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The Guitar Magazine

DECEMBER 2018 VOL 30 NO 3

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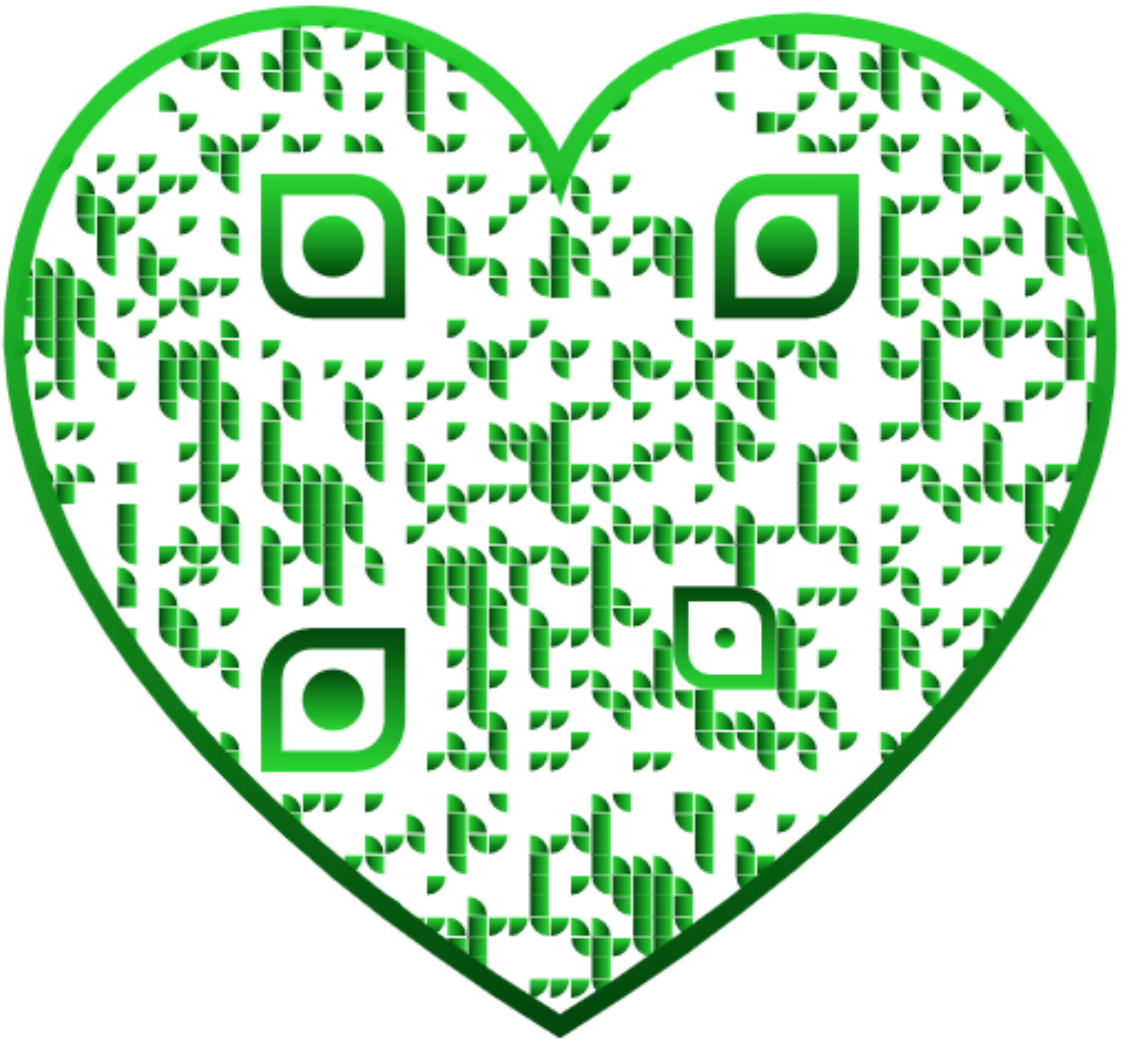

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The Guitar Magazine

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Show & Tell

Welcome to the biggest issue of *The Guitar Magazine* in recent history, with a whopping 148 pages packed with star players and stellar instruments, amplifiers and effects. As we approach the end of 2018, we inevitably start thinking about the best new products that we've encountered this year in preparation for next month's Gear Of The Year extravaganza

Personally, I've managed to end prolonged period of procrastination and actually buy a couple of things, in the shape of a mind-blowing Lazy J J10LC amplifier – 10 watts of chewy tweed tone, bristling with harmonics and bathed in glorious reverb and throbbing tremolo – and a 1983 Ibanez TS9 Tube Screamer that was a bit of a bargain on Reverb. I say bargain... it was a lot of money for an overdrive pedal that's almost as old as me but there is something about those little green boxes that I can't get enough of.

That's definitely the end of my spending for the year, though. I apologise in advance to my nearest and dearest for the lumps of coal and tangerines that will be all that Santa manages to smuggle down the chimney as a result. But at least Christmas will sound good. After all, *I Wish It Could Be Christmas Everyday* just doesn't sound right without that JRC4558D chip. Ahem...

Anyway, enough about my gear, let's hear about yours! Please write to us via email, or get in touch on Facebook or Instagram, and send us pictures – either of your favourite purchases of 2018 or the rigs with that you'll be rocking around the Christmas tree during the festive season. In the meantime, enjoy this month's magazine and I'll see you next time.

Chris Vinnicombe Editor
chris@guitar.com

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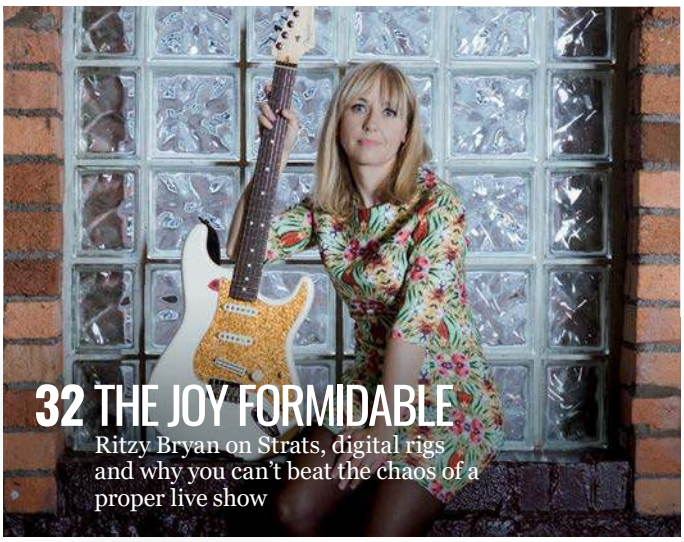

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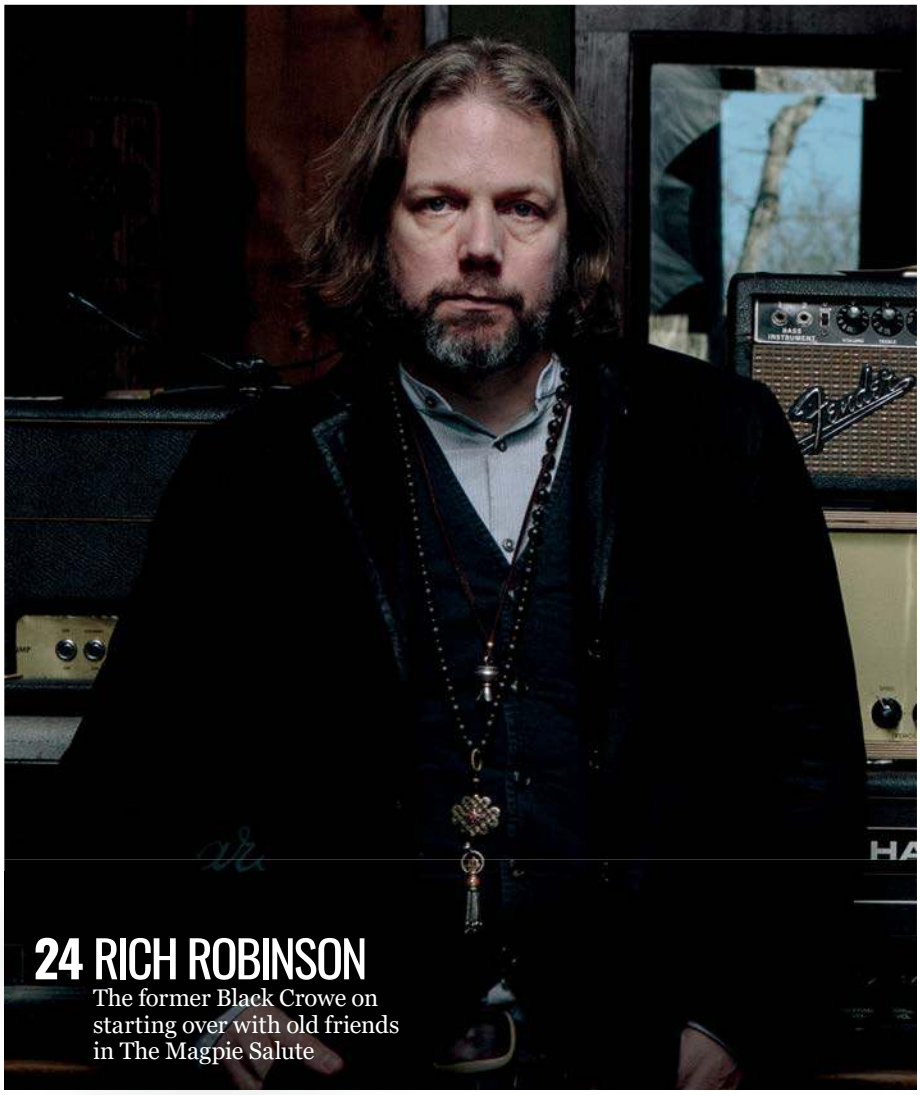

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The Guitar Magazine

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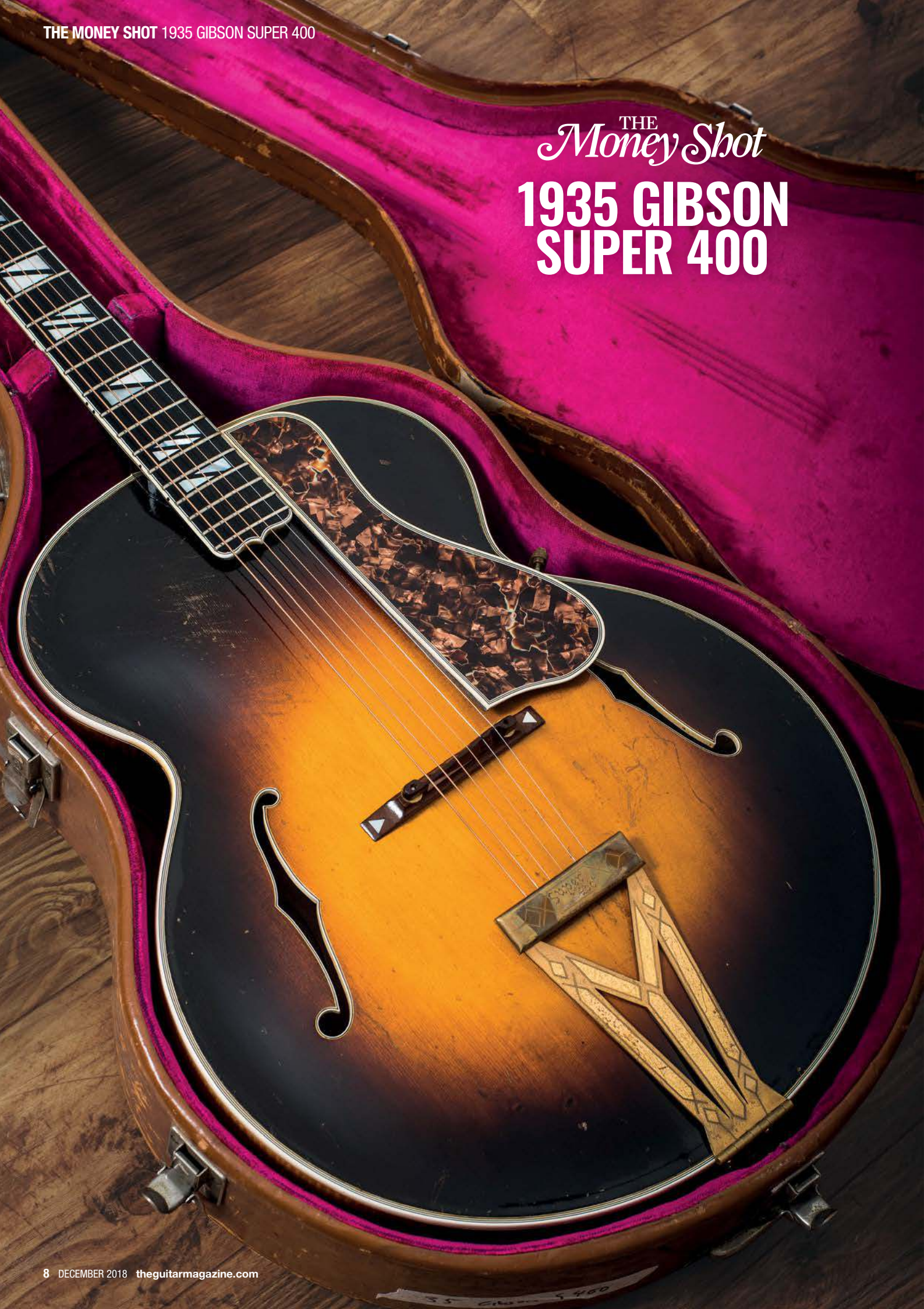
THE *Money Shot*

1935 GIBSON SUPER 400



Named after its original $400 price tag, the grandiose Gibson Super 400 was launched in 1934. It would provide inspiration for virtuoso jazz-guitar luthiers such as Elmer Stromberg and John D'Angelico, while later cutaway and electrified versions were a response to demand from players as the wheels of time turned and popular music evolved into daring new forms.

This gorgeous example is currently available from ATB Guitars in Cheltenham, UK and dates from 1935. It's a visual feast, with engraved Grover 'butterbean' open-gear tuners, an original marbleised celluloid pickguard and other high-end appointments adding a real taste of luxury. You'd expect an 83-year-old instrument to have some miles on the clock and the faded Pan American Clipper Cargo label on its well-travelled case suggests that this guitar earned its playing wear in a variety of locales. We can only imagine the scenes.

There's something truly enthralling about any encounter with a full 18-inch archtop from the Jazz Age, but the fat C-shaped neck and low action here are a delight. Gibson's 'golden era' may be considered to be the late 1950s but this is conclusive proof that the luthiers at 225 Parsons St in Kalamazoo were carrying out stellar work many years earlier. Visit atbguitars.com for more information.

ARCADE FIRE

James Bay knows it. Cory Wong knows it. Josh Smith knows it. Find out why pro players are getting hip to the allure of Frank Brothers guitars as Chris Vinnicombe takes the Canadian company's new Arcade Model for a spin...

Our first encounter with the Frank Brothers Guitar Company was in late 2017 when the Ontario firm's debut electric guitar design – the sublime chambered double-cut known as the Signature Model – waltzed in to the office and promptly smashed our hearts to smithereens.

Based in Toronto's artsy Studio District, luthier twins Tim and Nick Frank (aided by older sibling and managing partner, Jon) build instruments that fuse vintage and modern influences with exacting attention to detail. Sweating the small stuff is in their genes: grandfather Philip was an acclaimed concert violinist and no stranger to a Stradivarius or Guarneri, while their award-winning audio engineer dad Jim worked with the likes of Alice Cooper and Peter Gabriel.

Prior to Winter NAMM 2018, the Signature Model (from £3,330 direct) was the only Frank Brothers guitar that you could buy. With a bigleaf curly maple front and back cut from the same billet, bookmatched and then press-laminated to an arched, chambered mahogany core that tapers in thickness at the edge, the Signature Model is incredibly elegant but also time-consuming to produce. Enter its solidbody sibling, the Arcade Model.

NEW ADDITION

"The Arcade is the gritty, hard-driving little brother to the Signature Model," says Nick Frank. "We wanted to offer something to complement what we had been doing with the chambered-body Signature Model, which really drives in its own lane in terms of tonality. The Arcade falls more into that classic '59 tone with its solid, genuine mahogany body. It pairs amazingly well with PAFs and P-90s, and it loves higher-output pickups, too.

"The cool thing about the Arcade is that it still retains most of the features that make a Frank Brothers guitar stand out: the same body shape, carved top and back, diamond volute, and long-tenon neck joint with a hand-carved heel. It's all Frank Brothers, but with a more classic, bluesy rock 'n' roll sonic signature."

We wonder if adapting the Signature Model's unique design for the Arcade Model presented many challenges. "We were really conscious of the weight," Nick admits. "We wanted to get the benefits of the additional mass without making it feel like you have a boat anchor strapped to you.

"We decided to make the body a touch thinner than the semi-hollow Signature Model. 3.175mm thinner,

Opposite **Our review Arcade Model gets some TLC from Nick in the Frank Brothers workshop**

Left **The guitar's maple top is finished in satin Harvest Gold with off-white binding**

Below **While the brothers make sensible use of the latest technology, these guitars are still primarily made using the manual skill of master craftsmen**

to be precise. We experimented with different body thicknesses, but that was really the best balance between the weight and the tonality we were trying to achieve. The Arcades clock in on average at about 8lb, where as the Signature Models are usually around 7.25lb."

Our review model is a healthy 7.8lb, but should you desire something lighter – less svelte than the Signature Model, even – Nick reveals that the brothers have a guitar in the works that's set to weigh in at around 6lb. "We have also been building the first Ultra-Light," he tells us. "Which is our double-chambered semi-hollow body. This first one is super-cool, and features a single f-hole, figured Hawaiian koa top, and a genuine mahogany body and neck. The goal was to build a guitar that could bridge the gap between solidbody and hollow-body guitar. Incorporating classic ES tones, without sacrificing the sustain and attack that our guitars have become known for."

ARCADE GAMES

We can't wait to get our teeth into that one. But back to the matter at hand, our review guitar comes more or less as standard aside from off-white fretboard and headstock binding, a satin top in Harvest Gold (a hue that's closer to Fender's Shoreline than Gibson's Goldtop), and tortoiseshell for the headstock fascia, 'Broken Heart' pickguard and rear control cavity cover.

In the world of the Frank Brothers Guitar Company, the phrase 'more or less standard' translates as 'earth-shatteringly cool'. Especially in this incarnation, the Arcade Model is a real head-turner. All that tortoiseshell along with those witch-hat knobs lends a retro accent to an instrument that feels rather futuristic when viewed and handled in three dimensions thanks to its clean, angular lines and a subtly arched mahogany/maple body that tapers at the edges. The binding hides a 1/8 inches (3.175mm) maple cap, while the total body depth including the mahogany back is 51mm at its centre point, slimming down to 35.3mm at the sides.

Once you've got past the cleverly engineered FBGC-branded cardboard box that the instrument arrives in and opened its plush G&G fitted hard case, the brothers' determination that their customers should have an experience that goes above and beyond the average – even at the boutique end of the market – is further reinforced by a an array of logo'd case candy. There's a premium strap, replacement screws for Schaller straplocks (should you not wish to employ the Arcade's

Above **The distinctive 'bow tie' headstock is a Frank Brothers signature, and on our guitar it's had the tortie treatment to match the pickguard and control cavity cover**

Right **The 'broken heart' scratchplate is another common feature to both the Signature and Arcade models. Here, it contrasts beautifully with the Harvest Gold top and Light Brown back and sides**

bespoke satin brass buttons), picks, a certificate of authenticity and a cleaning cloth.

There's also a truss-rod wrench, which is handy as things have shifted a little on the way across the Atlantic. Happily, the slight buzz that results on the G and D strings around the ninth fret is easy enough to eliminate with a swift truss-rod tweak. On removing the tortoiseshell cover, even here, the attention to detail is second to none. Every screw on a Frank Brothers guitar is a flat-head machine screw that lives in a threaded brass insert (steel for the strap buttons) to ensure that they can be tightened without any fear of stripping threads – these are guitars built with the long haul in mind.

The mahogany neck is another virtuoso piece of woodworking from the brothers Frank. Finished in thin satin nitrocellulose, the profile is soft-shouldered and supremely comfortable medium C that flows from the exquisite diamond volute at the headstock end to the near-invisible join at the 'blended' heel. It feels as seamless as it appears and offers luxurious access right up to the 22nd of the guitar's immaculately installed Jescar 51108 frets.

The neck shape, "is meant to strike a balance between big stocky necks, and thin 'fast' necks," says Nick. "It's a comfortable medium C but with a little off the shoulders, which gives it a bit of a faster feel while still retaining enough mass to keep your hand from cramping up around a really skinny neck. This neck shape has been really popular and is on about 90 per cent of our guitars! We also offer other shapes including a '58 or '59, a 60s soft V, as well as fully custom shapes."

HIGH SCORING

Before we get too carried away with all this effusive praise, some words of caution: neither superlative build quality nor a killer aesthetic are guarantees of stellar sonics. The great guitar storage facility in the sky is piled high with cobwebbed cases containing well-made and good-looking instruments that just don't have what it takes to set pulses racing when plugged in.

We begin by setting the bar rather high, with benchmark P-90 solidbody tones provided by a '62 SG/Les Paul Junior and '54 Goldtop. Gibson's P-90s got brasher and ruder throughout the golden era, so this pair of vintage instruments covers an awful lot of ground. Compared to the Junior, the Arcade Model's Wolfetone Meaner bridge unit is smoother with less cut, but what it gives way in attack it more than makes up for in sustain and sophistication.

The LP Goldtop is a very different animal altogether – where the wrapover-bridge Les Paul hangs onto notes with an ethereal, almost foggy quality, in comparison, the Frank Brothers guitar's single notes are more hi-fi and laser-like. It's less 'vintage' in tonality but never sterile. The Arcade Model has less of that nasal quack, and more of an even balance when playing chords. The vintage instruments sound 'older' and more familiar – no surprises there – but despite tough opposition, our review guitar certainly isn't outclassed.

If you plan on picking up a Frank Brothers guitar for a five-minute noodle then be warned: instruments as

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CUSTOM SHOPPING

Have an idea for your dream Arcade or Signature Model? Talk to Frank Brothers…

The Arcade Model starts at £2,700 and the basic spec includes a satin-finished mahogany neck and body, a gloss maple top and a Macassar ebony fingerboard. You can also choose from Lollar or Seymour Duncan P-90s and two- or four-pot wiring, and the guitar comes with a lifetime warranty.

"We are all about customisation and getting to the root of what a customer is trying to achieve with their guitar," says Nick Frank. "We offer custom colours, neck shapes, and a variety of hardware, pickups, and wiring options for the Arcade Model.

"It's amazing working with customers to spec out the guitar they've been dreaming of. Some customers want to dive deep into the tonality, feel, weight, style, neck shapes, et cetera, which is always an exciting place to start. Others have some basic goals but otherwise want to give us the reins.

"We want to offer more than just a guitar, but also an interactive custom experience. We provide customers with weekly photo updates that show their guitar's construction. By the time it's complete they'll have over 100 photos that show the entire build process, as well as detailed glamour shots of the finished instrument."

Visit frankbrothersguitars.com to find out more

A custom Arcade Model from the collection of Robert Hart, aka Lost In Crystal Canyons

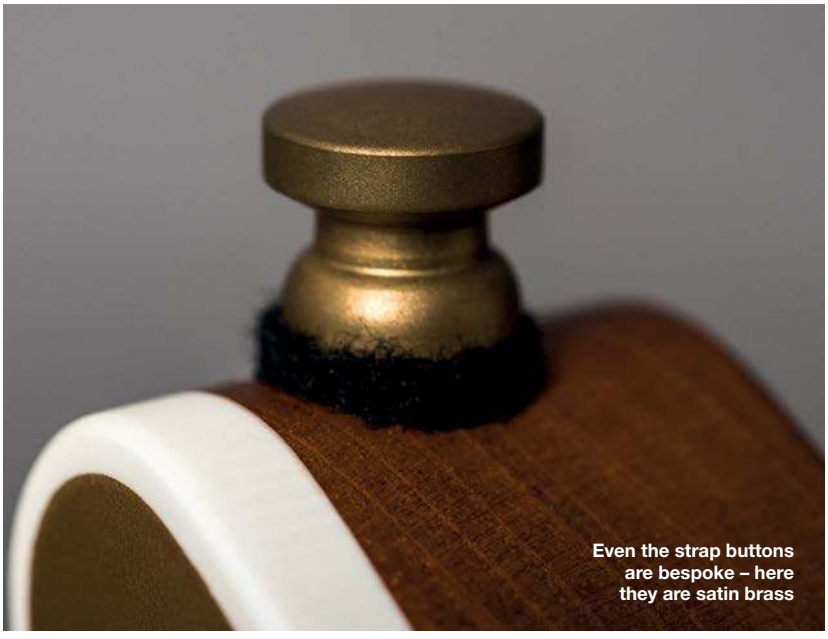
The neck join is a remarkable piece of woodworking, and is practically seamless

good as this have a habit of stopping time. Sure, there's extraordinary clarity and precision, notes are complex, there are bags of sustain... all of these aspects of the Arcade Model's appeal are quantifiable. But its most hypnotic – yet hardest to pinpoint – characteristic is the way in which it encourages you to step outside of the familiar.

Perhaps it's the near-effortless playability that clears a path for expression. But just as there's something inherently fresh and modernistic in the way that the brothers have approached the classic set-neck, double-cut blueprint, the Arcade Model encourages your fingers to find new places and shapes, too.

We've been playing the Arcade Model for an awfully long time before we realise that our Lazy J combo hasn't moved beyond a hint of breakup and a splash of reverb.

In common with the similarly artful Lowden GL-10 – another solidbody star of 2018 – such is the precision with which this instrument has been constructed, irrespective of whether the brothers see the Arcade Model as the ballsier member of the family or not, it almost seems crass to play power chords or straight-ahead rock 'n' roll on it.



Even the strap buttons are bespoke – here they are satin brass

KEY FEATURES

Frank Brothers Arcade Model

- **PRICE** £3,120 (as reviewed, inc hardcase). Arcade Model base price is £2,700. Pricing includes VAT. Shipping to the UK is an additional £150
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody double-cutaway electric guitar. Made in Canada
- **BUILD SOLID** Mahogany body with maple top, set mahogany neck with 12" radius Macassar ebony fingerboard, 22 Jescar 51108 frets, bone nut
- **HARDWARE** ABR-1 bridge, stop tailpiece, Gotoh open-back tuners, satin brass strap buttons
- **ELECTRICS** Wolfetone Mean (neck) and Meaner (bridge) P-90 pickups, 2x volume, 2x tone, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25"/635mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 43.0mm at nut, 52.3mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21.5mm at first fret, 23.6mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36.3mm at nut, 53.9mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 7.8lb/3.5kg
- **FINISH** Harvest Gold/Light Brown satin nitrocellulose
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes (Signature Model only)
- **CONTACT**
  Frank Brothers
  Guitar Company
  frankbrothersguitars.com

The internals are just as immaculately presented as the outside of the guitar

That said, we take the opportunity to mess its hair up a bit. Kicking in an old TS-9, adding some tremolo and rolling back the usefully-voiced tone controls takes us down to the swamp. We find a very cool array of slide tones in open D when we get there, and the guitar's natural balance and clarity help control the chaos. Even with the supplied 0.010 gauge D'Addario strings, it handles deep open tunings remarkably well, with piano-like bass, right down to an almost baritone-like open C. We said the Arcade Model encourages you to venture into uncharted territory, didn't we?

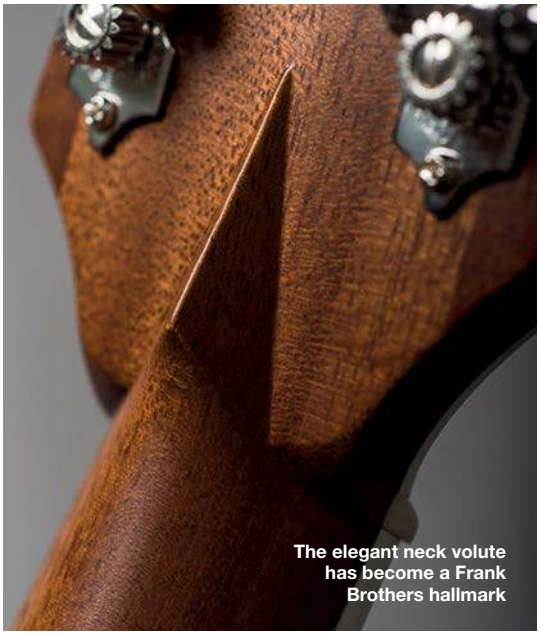
The Guitar Magazine **VERDICT**

+ Built with remarkable precision
+ Inspiring playability and tones
+ Numerous custom options

– In the age of the relic, some prefer their guitars to be rougher around the edges

Proof that Frank Brothers is much more than a one-hit wonder, the Arcade Model sees vintage meet modern with a level of style and substance that few can match

9/10



The elegant neck volute has become a Frank Brothers hallmark

VOL
VOL
TONE
TONE

© Getty Images

OTIS RUSH

1935-2018

Otis Rush, one of the last of the great original Chicago bluesmen, died in 29 September 2018 from complications related to a stroke. He was 83. Rising to prominence as one of the electric blues artists who, along with contemporaries Buddy Guy and Magic Sam, became a live fixture in the thriving hotbed of blues that was the Windy City in the 50s, he never became a household name – a fact he would refer to wryly and bitterly in his later lyrics and interviews. Instead, he earned himself a reputation as an innovator and a 'guitarist's guitarist', with his unusual 'southpaw' guitar style proving a major source of inspiration to later players including Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page, Peter Green, Paul Butterfield, Stevie Ray Vaughan and many others.

Born into a sharecropping family in Neshoba County, south of Philadelphia, Mississippi in 1935 (or 1934, according to some biographies), Rush was the sixth of seven children. He learned to play guitar when his elder brother, Leroy, was away from home. Being left-handed, he learned to play the right-handed guitar upside-down, emulating the blues sounds he heard on his mother's Victrola record player. When he visited his sister in Chicago and she took him to see Muddy Waters play, the teenage Rush was duly impressed: "I flipped out, man. I said: 'Damn. This is for me.'"

He moved to Chicago in 1948 and set about establishing his reputation playing clubs in the South and West Sides. Signed by the legendary Willie Dixon, Rush released a run of classic recordings on Eli Toscano's newly established Cobra label in the mid-50s. These innovative records earned him a hot streak of early success, and his soulful, versatile tenor voice, intense, earnest vocal delivery and distinctive and inventive minor-key-flavoured approach saw him become one of the genre's preeminent artists: his debut single, *I Can't Quit You Baby*, reached No 6 on the national Billboard R&B Charts and was later covered by Led Zeppelin and The Rolling Stones, among others.

Building on the imperious foundations already laid down by Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf, the trio of Buddy Guy, Magic Sam and Rush offered Chicago's guitar-savvy audiences a modern evolution. But where the former pair brought hyperactive showmanship to their act, Rush played it cool; he was a master of extended improvisation, who let his guitar and voice do the emoting. His upside-down playing style brought with it a unique approach to phrasing, which was despatched via an exquisite hummingbird of a vibrato, expressive, crying bends and emulation of slide phrases in standard tuning. In 1998, he told *Vintage Guitar* magazine: "See, when you play lefty, you're pulling that vibrato down to the floor. That makes things a lot easier in terms of pressure and control. It only makes sense – it's a lot less stress to tear a house down than to build it up, right? Pulling down makes more sense, to me anyway, and I can work it stronger and get it to sustain better. 'Course, besides all that, I kinda like doing things backwards, anyway."

Though he favoured the warm, rounded semi-hollowbody tones of Epiphone's Riviera, and Gibson's ES-335s, 345s and 355s for the majority of his career, he bookended this with early and latterday stints using a Stratocaster. He preferred to play through a Fender Bassman and, later, Mesa/Boogie amps.

He followed up his early success with several further blues classics for the Cobra label: among them were the horn-augmented minor-key *My Love Will Never Die* and *Double Trouble* and the Afro-Cuban-rhythm-based *All Your Love (I Miss Loving)*, the template for Santana's *Black Magic Woman*. After Cobra went out of business in 1958, Rush signed a short-lived deal with Chess Records in 1960, going on to work with a variety of labels over the next decades (Duke, Cotillion, Atlantic, Capitol, Bullfrog, Delmark and others). Though he regularly played live in his adopted hometown as well as Europe and Japan over the next decades, and was inducted into the Blues Hall Of Fame in 1984, his recording career increasingly became characterised by missed opportunity: Capitol inexplicably refused to release his 1971 record *Right Place, Wrong Time*, he walked out of sessions, even briefly retired, and complained that he wasn't consulted when Alligator edited and remixed one of his 1970s albums for re-release in 1991. However, his final studio album, *Any Place I'm Going*, earned him a Grammy Award in 1998 for Best Traditional Blues Album, following three nominations for earlier work.

Rush was beset by health problems, including diabetes and depression, and suffered a stroke in 2003, which curtailed his ability to play, sing and perform. However, when he appeared at the Chicago Blues Festival in 2016, city mayor, Rahm Emanuel, declared 12 June 'Otis Rush Day'. He's survived by his wife, Masaki, their daughters, Lena and Sophie, and by two sons and two daughters from a previous marriage.

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The Guitar Magazine COMPETITION WORTH £289!

WIN A Beetronics FX Royal Jelly overdrive/fuzz

TERMS & CONDITIONS

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When we first came across California pedal makers Beetronics FX, we wanted one of its units before we'd even heard one, purely on the basis of how damn cool they look – not a common state of affairs when it comes to the world of stompboxes. And now thanks to our friends at Face Distribution, you could have the amazingly cool looking and sounding Royal Jelly sat on your board by answering a simple question.

Thankfully, there's an awful lot more to the Royal Jelly than an undeniably cool case with 3D livery – this combined overdrive and fuzz pedal is made with a no-compromise approach to quality that means the insides look as eye-catchingly good as the casing.

The Royal Jelly's overdrive and fuzz circuits run in parallel, giving you the potential to create a massive array of dirty tones by blending them together using the 'Queen' and 'King' controls, both of which are footswitchable, meaning that you can have two blended sounds on tap, or have all fuzz on one, all overdrive on the other, and all stations in between. Needless to say, that's a positively massive level of versatility!

As if that wasn't enough, however, there's also a powerful EQ circuit that offers 10dB of cut and boost, you can blend your dry sound into the mix, and the Buzz switch is your instant ticket to the snarling high-end tonality and extra detail you'd associate with vintage fuzz pedals.

We reviewed the Royal Jelly in our November issue and were hugely impressed, noting that it was "absolutely full of sweet spots, with the pedal's ability to blend your dry sound being perhaps the sweetest morsel of all". To find out more about Beetronics FX, visit beetronicsfx.com, and to be in with a chance of winning one yourself, simply head to the link below and answer the following question:

theguitarmagazine.com/comps/beetronics

Q Which of these is NOT a current Beetronics FX pedal

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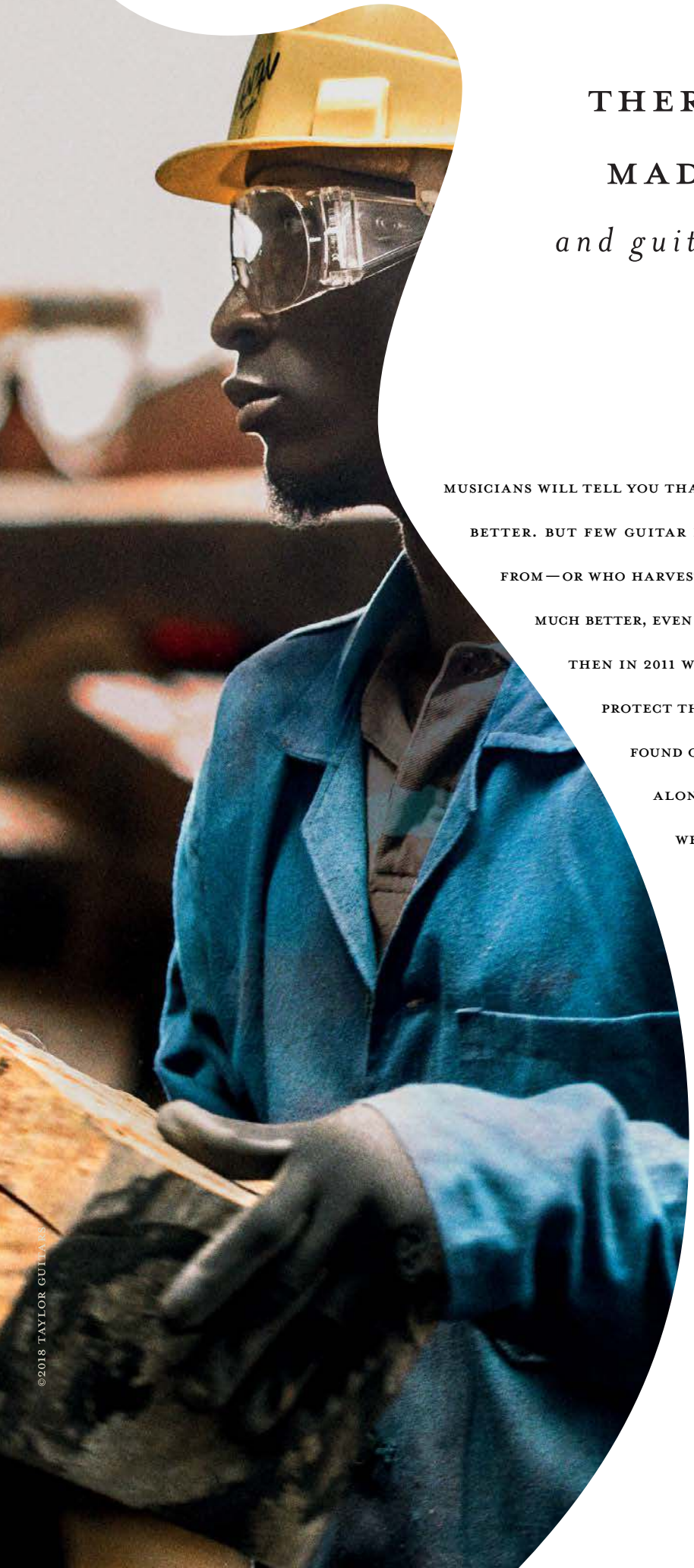

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FLYING HIGH

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AGAIN

The Magpie Salute was Rich Robinson's means of forging ahead with music after The Black Crowes finally split for good in 2015. Tragedy struck the band at the very outset, but they persevered to create a debut album that's a "celebration" of where they've come from. Robinson talks to Teri Saccone about the difference between Crowes and Magpies, his love of roots music, and open tunings...

Whether it's his new band The Magpie Salute or his former one, The Black Crowes, it's all about connectedness for Rich Robinson. For example, when the 49-year-old Georgian formed his new band in the wake of the platinum-selling rockers' demise in 2015, he had to bring fellow ex-Crowes Marc Ford and Sven Pipien into the fold, too. The Crowes were, of course, co-founded by Robinson and brother/frontman Chris, bursting onto the scene in 1989 with rock 'n' soul swagger, with Robinson filling the brief of rhythm guitarist and chief songwriter.

However, the band's global success papered over some hefty personal and creative differences – primarily between the two brothers. In 2015, after eight studio albums of critically and commercially lauded Americana-vibed rock 'n' roll, the final, acrimonious split occurred.

Introspective and considered, the younger Robinson has never courted the limelight, but music was still his passion, and so Rich quickly embarked on a solo career that saw him prove his mettle as an acoustic guitarist, but there was still rock 'n' roll in his future.

The birth of The Magpie Salute – bluesy and often heavier than the Crowes, and yet highly-nuanced and steeped in harmonies – was something that took Robinson almost by surprise.

"What I like is that it happened so organically," he explains when we chat to him on a trip to London. "I was touring my last solo album [*The Ceaseless Sight*] and an opportunity arose to play a show at Applewood Studios in Woodstock New York, where I liked to record. They invite artists to record live there with 100 people in attendance. The audience gets a glimpse into the recording process, too. As I get older I appreciate the strong musical bonds you sometimes get after many years of doing this. That happened when Marc Ford and I played together so I reached out to him and he said, 'I don't care what its for, I'll be there'. So it's kinda cool that we're on the same page.

"I then called [keyboard player] Ed Harsch and it was like merging our pasts with the new. Just writing a setlist around that event for a three-day show I put together 76 songs from my solo stuff and the Crowes. I looked at it as a Delaney & Bonnie/Joe Cocker with Mad Dogs & Englishmen-vibe just for that weekend."

CARRYING ON

But the remarkable and familiar chemistry between the three meant that almost immediately it was clear that the project would extend beyond a one-off jaunt.

"I recruited singer Jon Hogg, and then I started to think about naming it," Rich recalls. "We were always gonna be 'cousins of Crowes' – there's no denying it – and I like the word 'magpie', because the word represents both dark and light, whereas crows tend to be dark creatures. Also the fact that the English once saluted magpies for good fortune upon seeing them by saying, 'Good morning, captain', which was also the name of a Crowes song... all of those elements sealed the name for me. We did shows soon after the weekend gig and they all sold out. After the shows we solidified the band idea."

But then, tragedy struck. "Then Eddie suddenly died," Chris explains sadly. "His mother told me right after that he'd always wanted to play music with me again. But his desire for wanting this made us continue on from there. So we booked a tour. We put out the live show as a record (2017's *The Magpie Salute*). Everyone in our band has played with me or us in the past, so it was a convergence of people and music. I wanted it to be a celebration, and it felt like it from the very beginning."

That convergence has resulted in the band's first full-length studio album, called *High Water I* (Rich tells us its follow-up will be called *High Water II*)

"We recorded 28 songs for the debut album," he explains. "The whole point of the new music is to focus on the songs as a band. We began writing in January: Jon, myself and Marc. I wouldn't say it's a concept album but it's a common-piece both of the albums: There is the water title which denotes cleansing, rebirth."

GETTING PERSONAL

While the songs may be collaborative, from a lyrical perspective, Robinson is coming from a deeply personal place when he writes for The Magpie Salute.

"Humanity is a theme, and seeking a little bit higher things than what we're given nowadays, as it pertains to what music, art, creation is," Rich reflects. "The world is filled with so much technology, so much of reality is mired in digital, big pharma... which blunts human emotions. But humanity needs to feel things. So these songs cover universal themes. For me as a writer I need to shoot higher than fame or money, and the need to validate people's emotions is important.

"Just as an architect has the responsibility of not building a shitty building that will fall apart, artists, too have to answer to functionality. Songwriters create things that help humanity a bit: hopefully songs that help us feel better. That's where we're coming from. I feel like a ton of people are so lost in the Western world right now. What kind of world will our kids be inheriting?"

As befits an album that came together so organically, the songwriting process was varied and collaborative when it came to creating *High Water I*.

"There are different configurations for these songs that I wrote with Mark and Jon... or they did alone," he explains. "*Sister Moon* was written by Jon and Marc. That is a keyboard-based song with lap-steel, but whenever great song that came into play, we included it. So it's just a collection of whatever works for the band. Everyone brought something to the table. I produced it because someone had to be in charge!"

© DavidMcClisterPhoto

For Rich, songwriting isn't a manufactured exercise, but rather an organic one.

"I don't believe that I can try hard to write a good song," he insists. "For me, I just tap into the subconscious when I'm feeling it, and luckily it comes to me that way. I never sit at the piano or with a guitar to write a song if it's not already in my consciousness. I can't just treat songwriting like a job where I'll spend hours writing music. I can't write that way although I'm sure other people can get great songs that way. I have to feel inspired to write.

"I don't question as to where it even comes from. When it does happen and it's a great song then it's just lightning in a bottle so I try to grab it fast. Conversely I constantly write. Even when I'm on tour, I'll always have a guitar with me because I just feel like writing so often. But for me it always starts with a melody. I think a great song is a gift and the most important thing in all of this. You can put the best guitar solo on a shitty song and it's still a shitty song. But a classic like *Tangled Up In Blue* will last forever."

PRODUCTION PLACEMENT

A reluctant producer he might have been, but Rich has begun to master the subtle art of being in charge yet keeping the band vibe intact.

"It's totally a band thing," he reiterates. "For me, my solo albums were like finger painting because we tried whatever we wanted, me and my drummer [Joe Magistro] just playing around, but I've kind of fulfilled that now. I'm now wanting a bigger project and I've been producing for a long time with strong ideas as to idea of what it should sound like I'm comfortable saying that. I respect the band's unique input but then I don't like too much interference as I've a clear vision."

When it comes to the guitar side, both Robinson and former Crowe Marc Ford each bring their own strengths and preferences, and again the duties are spit on a very egalitarian basis.

"It varies all over the record," Rich acknowledges. "For songs he wrote, I'll do solos, licks, counter-rhythm and melodies. And for songs I played and wrote he'll do the same. Having so many people in the band [TMS has six permanent members and up to 10 in live setting] and dealing with our budget, we had to have a finite time in the studio. So I had three weeks for the band and two weeks for me and Jon to do all the vocals.

"That being said, after they all left, I changed some songs that weren't working – I would add solos after it was all done, maybe change things a bit. One of Marc's songs *Walk On Water* started in one direction, and I changed it to a more acoustic-y thing. I threw on a 12-string solo, and then I wrote to Marc telling him that I hoped he liked it. He replied with, 'That was you? I thought it was me!' So it was funny. So in the end it got to the point where we didn't really know who played what. It's only to serve the songs."

LOST LOVES

In 2012, Hurricane Sandy caused huge devastation along the US east coast, and with most of his gear kept in storage in New Jersey, the hurricane also claimed many of the prized guitars that Robinson collected over the years. It's a nightmare scenario for any guitarist, yet Robinson has managed to keep it in all in perspective.

"I lost almost everything," he reflects. "There were dumpsters of ruined gear, except about five guitars. But there was a cleansing element to it. Guitars are made of wood and I bought more pieces of wood with strings on afterwards. So I just started over collecting and the new guitars sound like me when I play them, so I moved on.

"The one thing luckily the flood didn't take was a 1953 D-28 that my father gave me, and with which I played on *She Talks To Angels* and across *Shake Your Money Maker*, so I love that."

His rebuilt collection heavily on Gretsch – with both White and Black Falcons in the mix, plus a '56 Streamliner and a Zemaitis.

"On the album I also used a Dan Armstrong with a pickup that was made for me," he adds. "Plus I've got a Mary Kaye Strat I use a lot, a Danelectro 12-string, this great yellow Tele I've had for a while, my Goldtop I've had forever, and one of my 335s. One was destroyed and the company who fixed it did a great job, but it wasn't the same guitar in feel or sound anymore – it started to delaminate. But the Goldtop turned out much better than it ever sounded before the flood, and their repair ironically made it sound better than ever!

"I also have a '68 335 with a Bigsby on it. I've got the prototype – the signature one – which a master builder at Gibson made for me which is great. So I use those and I have this great SG. So I go through a lot of guitars. Everything sounds different, brings a different timbre. I use a bunch of amps too. It's never just one thing I've had my [Marshall] Silver Jubilee from *Southern Harmony* and *Shake Your Money Maker*."

When it comes to the playing side, Robinson is a big fan of open tunings and that's also a feature of *High Water I*. "Early on, I was drawn to Nick Drake," he recalls. "One of my biggest influences besides Drake was Stephen Stills and on his solo albums he used a lot of open tunings, too. My tunings are pretty standard for this one: Open A, E, F, G and standard drop-D."

With 30 years in the spotlight under his belt, Robinson must have picked up a fair bit of wisdom and knowledge, but his guitar-playing advice is suitably universal, philosophical and meaningful: "Ultimately, the best advice is to be sincere, don't fake it. No one can really write for anyone else, no one has your experience, genetics, upbringing, struggles and triumphs as a human on this planet. As long as you stay sincere, just write things that mean something."

***High Water I* is out now on Magpie Records**

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GEOFF EMERICK

1945-2018

We were saddened to hear that Grammy Award-winning Beatles engineer Geoff Emerick died on 2 October following a heart attack in Los Angeles. He was 72. Emerick worked on Beatles masterpieces such as *Revolver*, *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* and *Abbey Road*, along with Wings' *Band On The Run*, *Odessey And Oracle* by the Zombies, Robin Trower's *Bridge Of Sighs* and albums by many other iconic recording artists, including Elvis Costello, Jeff Beck and more.

Paul McCartney led the tributes, remembering Emerick as, "smart, fun-loving, and the genius behind many of the great sounds on our records." He went on to say that he was "shocked and saddened to have lost such a special friend."

Born in London shortly after the end of World War II, Emerick worked as an assistant engineer on early Beatles sessions while still a teenager, but it was his work on *Tomorrow Never Knows* in April 1966 at the age of just 20 that was truly groundbreaking.

As interpreter of The Beatles' increasingly lysergic vision of how their records should sound, it was Emerick who suggested recording Lennon's vocal through a Leslie rotating speaker cabinet and close-micing Ringo Starr's drums – a practice that had previously been prohibited at EMI Studios. During the *Paperback Writer* sessions, also in April of that year, it was Emerick's idea to use a speaker as a microphone to attempt to achieve the bigger, Motown-style bass guitar sounds that The Beatles craved.

Although he walked out of the 'White Album' sessions in frustration in July 1968, Emerick's work on *Sgt Pepper* the previous year had already netted him a Grammy Award and he would win another after returning to the fold to work on *Abbey Road*. George Martin credited Emerick with bringing "a new kind of mind" to the band's recordings, "always suggesting sonic ideas." It's fair to say that the landscape of popular music would sound very different without Geoff Emerick's input.

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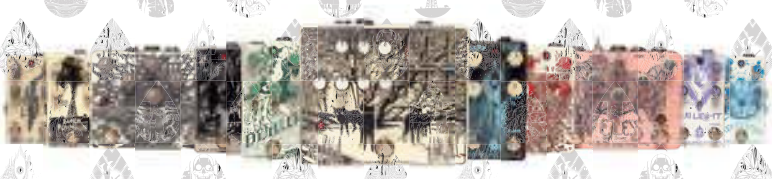

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ODE TO JOY

In just over a decade **The Joy Formidable** have gone from their hometown of Mold to opening arenas for the Foo Fighters, thanks in no small part to their kinetic brand of stripped-down rock. Huw Baines meets guitarist and frontwoman Ritzy Bryan to talk Fenders, digital rigs and Elvis Costello...

PORTRAITS ELEANOR JANE

The first thing to note about The Joy Formidable's new album, *AAARTH,* is that it nearly didn't happen. In another world, 2016's *Hitch* was etched into the history books as The Joy Formidable's final LP. "Going into the studio, especially in this band, is not always a cathartic thing," vocalist and guitarist Ritzy Bryan says, while sat on a fathoms-deep sofa at Cardiff's Clwb Ifor Bach. "It's an emotional journey. We've done enough records to know what the process can end up bringing out. It's definitely affecting, and we were questioning whether or not we were in the right frame of mind to go there."

> "We're still the band we set out to be. We didn't want to be unravelled by this industry"

Prior to recording, Bryan admits that bassist Rhydian Dafydd was working through some "pretty horrible, ugly stuff", while she also stared down a case of writer's block for the first time in her career. Rather than enter the studio with a spring in their step, and a stack of ideas in their pockets, the band hit record with the feeling that they had nothing to lose. But from the moment *Y Bluen Eira*'s crushingly heavy riff smashes through the speakers, driven by a thunderous performance from drummer Matthew James Thomas, it's clear that a high stakes game suited them just fine.

"There was kind of a relief element that we were enjoying it and we were still the band we set out to be right at the beginning," Bryan says. "We didn't want to be unravelled by this industry. We've always seen each other as having the tenacity and balls to

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have a long career. To get to the point where we felt like we'd been beaten brought in a different emotional quality that went somewhere hopeful. This anger was channelled in a good way."

BREAKING RULES

AAARTH is a multifaceted record. It's home to the usual generous helping of Bryan's rich vocal hooks, but it's also happy to spin off in any direction it chooses, whether that's the creeping weird-pop of *Cicada (Land on Your Back)* or an old school glam-rock rager such as *What For*. Its sharp edges are resolute and confrontational, with requests to tone the guitars down for radio play swiftly ignored. After recording *Hitch* in North Wales, which was a case of heading home for the group, this LP was tracked in Utah, where they quickly embraced the spirit of experimentation under a boundless sky.

"If ever there was a tiny The Joy Formidable record-making rulebook, it got thrown out of the window and it was a real free for all," Bryan says. "It changed the perspective on the production. The guitars feel more playful. They come and go, and there are lots of different sounds. When we were looking back at these

> "*The Wrong Side* has so many filters and delays one after another"

sessions the word collage came up a lot. It was like the programme *Spaced*, where [the character] Brian is just fucking throwing paint at a wall. There was definitely a bit of craziness."

Rubber stamping their power-trio credentials, Dafydd played like a second guitarist throughout the sessions and often provided the initial impetus for songs with some uncompromising bass riffage. They then utilised MIDI sounds and Guitar Rig alongside some vintage kit, allowing them to follow their collective muse without becoming bogged down in what Bryan terms a "gearhead maze". A case in point can be found in the tangled web of a solo that lights up the chugging single *The Wrong Side*.

"It has so many filters and delays happening one after another," Bryan says. "It's not that you couldn't do that with an analogue setup, because you could, but it's whether you would get to that place as quickly and not lose some of the beauty of the momentum within that. We've got that digital side combined with some nice tube distortions and I've never really swerved from my very first amp, which is a Fender Hot Rod."

GOING DIGITAL

This balancing act is replicated when the band stride on stage later that night. In Cardiff, Bryan is travelling light – the show is one of two, along with a night at London's Lexington, slotted in prior to Reading and Leeds festivals – before rolling out a newly finessed setup to open for Foo Fighters at enormodomes in the US and Canada. Over time, and as The Joy Formidable's discography has deepened, she has come to believe that

less is sometimes more. That's true whether she's in the studio or attempting to melt faces at a hundred paces live.

"We've always got a few toys to play with, but not so many that we get lost," she says. "At the end of the last cycle I had a really big analogue board. It was a thing of real beauty and I loved it, but across so many records, when you need to get a lot of different effects, I've had to streamline it. Guitar Rig gives me a lot of choice. I'm using those two worlds."

To complement her Fender amp, Bryan is an avowed Stratocaster fan. She has a US model that remained in heavy rotation while recording *AAARTH* – without ever making it out on the road just in case – but also a guitar from humble beginnings that became a star in a supporting role. "I picked up a really fun SG copy from a tiny little shop in Mold, North Wales," she says. "I really like that on the record. It's got really good resonance and it's easy to play even though it hasn't had any love. It's got a great feel to it, and nothing special going on in the pickup world or anything."

Bryan's love of Fender goes back to the very beginning. Her first guitar was a 90s-era Mexican-made Strat and it retains a special place in her heart despite having been through some tough times. "It lives at home in the studio with me," she says. "It's seen better days. It had a nut accident about seven years ago and

> "We've always got a few toys to play with, but not so many that we get lost"

the person I sent it to fix it didn't do a very good job. He butchered it.

"I've got a really good guy now who can fix and modify a few things, so he sets up for me. He's done the best job of fixing this guitar, but it's noticeably not a recording guitar. It's fucking beautiful. If you play all my Strats –

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ELVIS LIVES

Along with the Strats, something else that can be traced back to Bryan's earliest musical experiences is her belief that the song should always come first. When asked which guitarists first inspired her to see the instrument as something more that steel and wood, it's not a fretboard wizard that comes to mind. Instead, it's a snotty, bespectacled punk who now commands a place as one of the UK's most respected songwriters: Elvis Costello.

"I saw him as a young child in Liverpool, when he was playing a homecoming show, and it was electric," she says. "I was about seven years old and I went home and asked my parents if they would buy me all his songbooks. I'd started dabbling with poetry and classical guitar and there was something about his sneering, aggressive set. He's a great lyricist and it left a really big impression. All of a sudden these words, this poetry, could go hand in hand with this guitar that I'd started to play. That was the starting point. My songbooks date from that year, when I first went to see him in concert."

> "The live experience is a hard one to replicate... feeling the real soul"

Now, 11 years into their career, not to mention four LPs and dedicated followings on both sides of the Atlantic, The Joy Formidable are now in the business of opening doors as Costello once did. Bryan's playing – ferocious and precise but somehow wistful and open-ended – remains the focal point of their sound.

She is one of a number of female guitarists helping to shift an industry balance that has always been dominated by men. But it's clear times are changing. From the pop visionary St Vincent – with whom Ritzy shares a free-flowing experimental approach to the guitar – to fellow deliverers of dextrous distortion such as Lzzy Hale or Marissa Paternoster of Screaming Females, women are increasingly shaping the guitar conversation. In a world where the narrative about guitar and guitar music is often pretty negative, *AAARTH* shows what a diverse instrument the guitar can still be.

"I feel disheartened when I hear about guitar companies struggling, for example," she says. "But I'm not afraid. There's going to be a new appreciation for wanting to learn an instrument and a craft, and realising you have to put time and heart into something. The live experience is a very hard one to replicate. You might be able to make things easy in other ways but I hope that people on stage, playing instruments and feeling the real soul and bare bones, isn't something that's going to go away."

The Joy Formidable's new album, *AAARTH*, is out now on Hassle Records

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As you'll see from our review on p118, Old Blood Noise Endeavours is the latest US boutique builder to burst onto the scene with some radical ideas about design, tone and, it seems, philosophy. Now we're giving you the chance to win one of the company's uniquely eccentric multi-effects stompboxes in the shape of the Excess – a combined distortion and modulation pedal.

"We live in a time of Excess," says OBNE on the front page of the manual to this baby pink noisemaker, and excessive sounds are the name of the game here. If you thought that lashings of high-gain distortion layered with chorus and delay went the way of the buffalo when guitarists threw away their hairspray and codpieces at the end of the 1980s, well think again, because the Excess offers all three effects in one unit.

The clever thing about the Excess is that you can choose just what flavour you want your 80s rock goodness to come in. With footswitchable control of chorus and delay, you can choose if you want your high-gain sound to be complimented by lush chorus or evocative slapback, and there's independent volume controls for both distortion and modulation so you can tailor the balance to taste.

The Excess also offers you control over the signal path of the two sounds thanks to the series/parallel switch. In series mode, the distortion effect flows into the modulation effect, stacking their sound and volumes. In parallel mode, the two effects are summed to a single output, resulting in a clear modulation with a distorted layer underneath, cleanly separated.

It all adds up to a pedal that OBNE says will create sounds that are "over the top, eccentric, usefully useless" that both hark back to the 80s but also create something totally new. If that sounds like your thing, head to oldbloodnoise.com to find out more about the firm's effects. And to be in with a chance of winning one yourself, simply head to the link below and answer the following question:

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Ones TO *Watch*

JOSHUA BURNSIDE

With a growing audience on both sides of the Atlantic, Joshua Burnside's star is on the rise. Here the Irish guitarist talks to Sam Roberts about his globe-trotting musical outlook

Joshua Burnside was born and raised in Ireland, but he pulls in influences from all over the world including Colombia, Indonesia and Eastern Europe. That's quite impressive for a man with hands 'too soft for a six-string'. "My dad played guitar, he told me that my younger brother had the fingers for it and I didn't," Joshua reveals. "Mine were too soft apparently. But that's the best encouragement you can give to a competitive sibling!"

That 'encouragement' was clearly effective, and has borne a guitarist with a passion for finding and incorporating new sonic inspirations into his music, as evidenced on the unique Scotland-via-Columbia stew of his debut LP, *Ephrata*. "I lived in Glasgow for a couple of years, and soaked up some of the music going on there, then moved to Colombia where I absorbed some of that culture, and Cumbia folk music, too," he explains. "The album was started in Glasgow and finished in Colombia."

Ephrata received critical acclaim, gaining over 3.5 million streams on Spotify and winning the Northern Ireland Music Prize in 2017 – beating off competition from Two Door Cinema Club, The Divine Comedy and others – despite "being written in about a month". He admits the prize was a significant moment in his young career, particularly because it was awarded to his debut record. "It was a really great moment for me, especially as it was my first LP," he explains. "It was recorded pretty quickly back home and then just kind of thrown out there into the world, I didn't expect much from it!"

Joshua's triumph resulted in extended press and opportunities, most notably the chance to play at SXSW. "I think winning the NI Music Prize helped that along, and the Belfast-based label that put out my album, *Quiet Arch*, has had a few artists out at SXSW before." What he is coy about, however, is NPR noting him as an act to be excited about in their 'Austin 100' list of artists to watch at the festival.

But the praise from critics doesn't begin and end there. He's also a favourite on the airwaves, receiving BBC airplay from Tom Robinson, Lauren Laverne et al. "BBC 6 Music, BBC Radio Ulster and Radio 1 have all been especially supportive over the last couple of years. You hear a lot about artists early on in their career paying through the nose for radio plugging and then get nothing out of it, so I feel very lucky to have had their support."

WORLD TRAVELLER

With a globe-trotting first album already in the can, Burnside is keen to expand his

musical frame of reference even further for the follow-up. His forthcoming sophomore album features musicians from places as far flung as Indonesia. “I worked with a band called Svara Samsara in Jakarta for some percussion on the next record,” he enthuses. “I think it’s good to get out of your comfort zone, working with musicians who think differently about rhythm and melody is a good way of doing that.”

Out of his comfort zone he remains for the follow-up to his prize winning debut, deciding to go slightly leftfield by writing a record with “an over-arching concept and theme.” This aim hasn’t stopped him from writing music in line with *Ephrata* however, with an EP also released as recently as June. “I had a few songs recorded that were separate to that [album two], which became the *All Round The Light Said EP*. I decided to put that out while those songs still felt relevant.”

Despite the guitar being Joshua’s instrument of choice, he remains excited by other instrumentation, and he played a number of others on *Ephrata* including the accordion and banjo. “I play many instruments badly!” he laughs. “It’s normally because I decide whilst recording, ‘Oh it would be nice if I had this or that texture for this verse or that chorus’, so I pick up the accordion or banjo or whatever...”

When it comes to live shows, his inspiration is somewhat more rudimentary, thanks in part to his love of rock music during his teenage years. “I think because I started out listening to heavy music in my teens I get really bored if I’m watching a band and they’re just standing there, motionless, playing their songs exactly as they are on the album. People go to gigs to *see* a band play!”

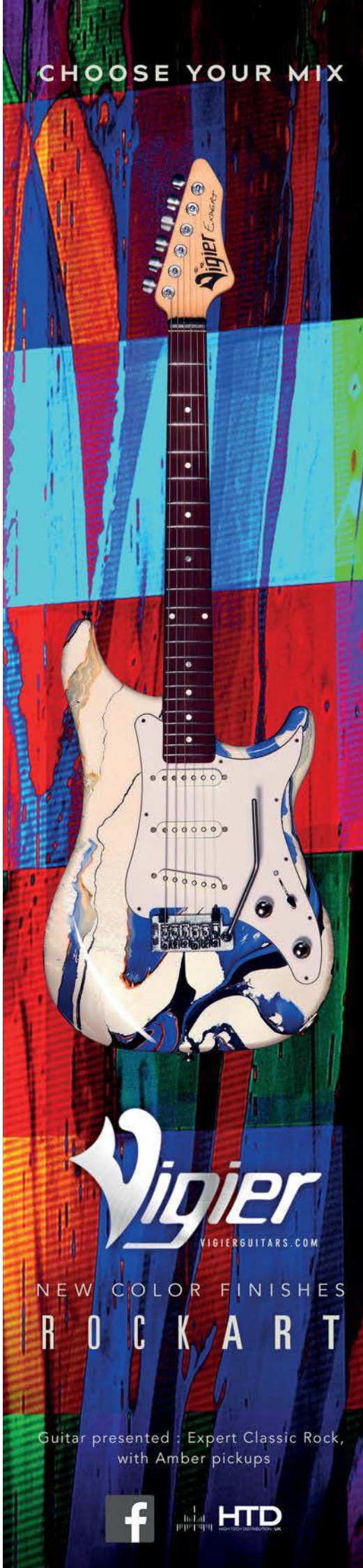
CANDY CRUSH

Joshua’s guitar of choice throughout his live shows is a Candy Apple Red Jaguar, which only came into his position through a loving gesture from a friend following an accident. “My first guitar was a turquoise Cort electric. I played it in my first band but it got destroyed in a car accident when I was a kid, so a family friend gave me a red Fender Jaguar – a pretty good upgrade! – which is what I still use today for most shows.”

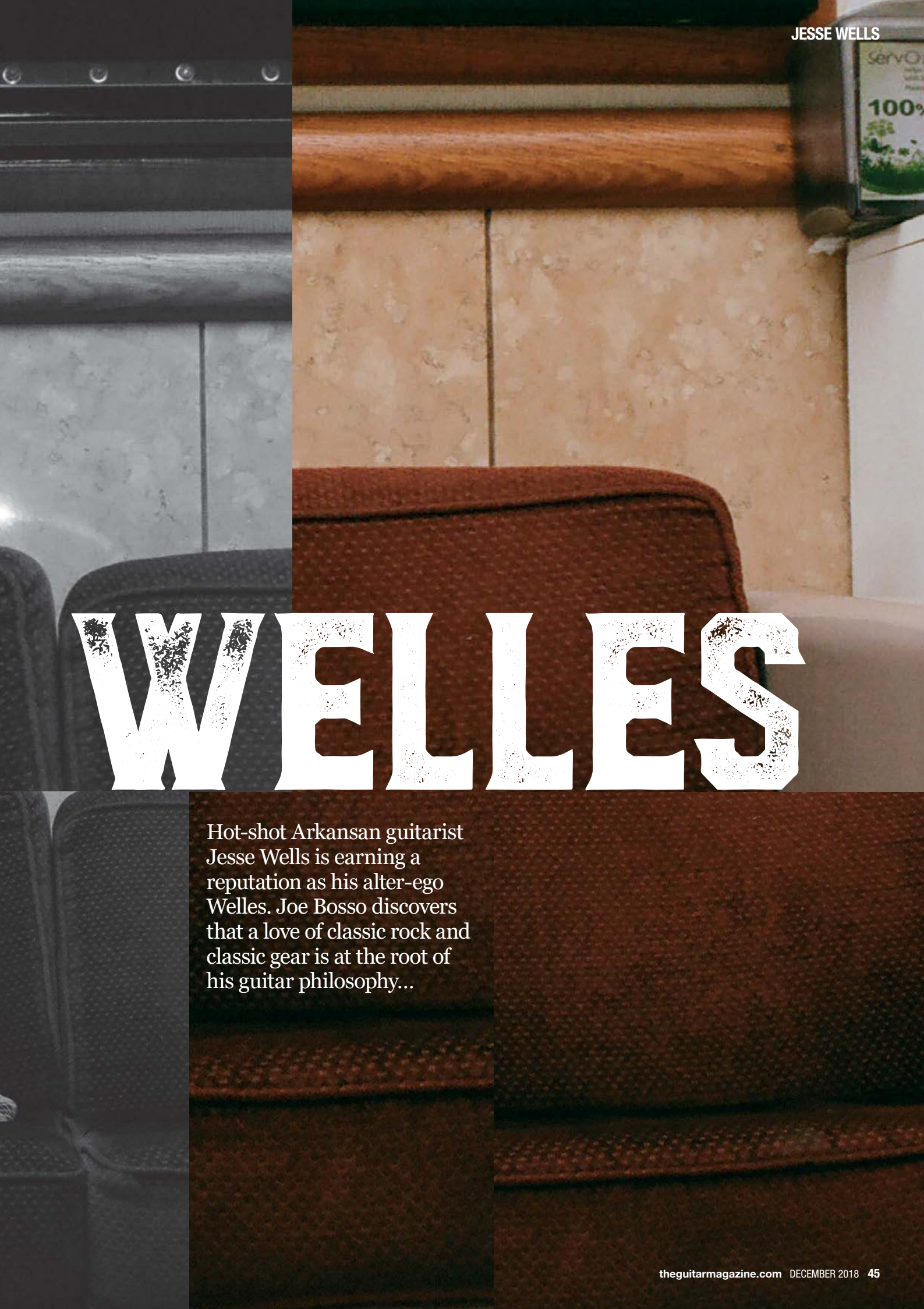
> “My Cort electric got destroyed in a car accident, so a family friend gave me a Fender Jaguar – a pretty good upgrade!”

And those shows keep coming. Joshua’s currently embarking on a UK tour, which runs up until Christmas, before heading stateside in the New Year. Given his passion for unusual sounds, we’re sure he’ll find his share of intriguing and eccentric influences to incorporate into his sound along the way...

***Ephrata* is out now on Quiet Arch Records**



JESSE WELLS
WISHING



WELLES

Hot-shot Arkansan guitarist Jesse Wells is earning a reputation as his alter-ego Welles. Joe Bosso discovers that a love of classic rock and classic gear is at the root of his guitar philosophy...

Like any artist of his generation, 23-year-old singer-songwriter and guitarist Jesse Wells never got to see Led Zeppelin perform live in their unmatchable pomp. But while growing up in Fayetteville, Arkansas, one of the first things he did once he got access to the internet was pull up a YouTube clip of the band appearing on Danish TV in 1969. "It's still one of the greatest things I've ever seen," Wells recalls. "These kids are seated on the floor, and right in front of them is Led Zeppelin. It was great to see what rock 'n' roll looked like when it was long-haired, skinny and dangerous. Jimmy Page is playing a Telecaster, and he sounds totally sick, dirty and twisted. That was the sound I wanted."

Having previously released music as 'Jeh Sea Wells', and as frontman of the bands Dead Indian and Cosmic-American, Wells now performs under the alter-ego 'Welles'. As Welles, he channels that early Jimmy Page sound – plus early 70s British glam, 90s grunge rock, Plastic Ono Band-era John Lennon, and hints of Bob Dylan and Tom Petty – into his debut, *Red Trees And White Trashes*. "I never try to hide my influences," Wells notes, pointing to the stomping Marc Bolan tribute *Rock N Roll* as an example. "When I wrote that song, I had just finished listening to T. Rex's *The Slider*. I said to myself, 'I can't top that one, so I'm just gonna write my own version of it. That was me saying, 'Rock 'n' roll today is the same thing it was in the 70s. It's the smell of gasoline and the utter disregard for societal standards.'"

The 13 songs on *Red Trees And White Trashes* aren't tame. They come at you in an almost confrontational way, but they're beautifully structured and packed with a Tin Pan Alley of hooks. When Wells opens his throat on rockers such as *Into Ashes* and *Codeine*, he's letting listeners in on a wild-child catharsis – feel what I'm feeling, or get out of the way. In much the same way, his guitar playing is a soul-baring, all-senses rattling affair. At the end of the slow-burning power ballad *Seventeen*, he uncorks a psychedelic, improvisational solo that seethes with barely contained adrenaline and volatility.

"IF YOU WANT EMOTION, YOUR AMPS HAVE GOTTA SCREAM AND BLEED"

"If you want emotion, your amps have gotta scream and bleed," he says. "They have to sound fuzzy and hairy. They used to. Back in the day, the sound from a guitar amp was this big and nasty thing – that's how your solos became alive. I don't know why people got away from that. It's fine to use technology, but I don't believe in tricks or plugins. I go right to my amp as a source. You should always go to the source. Your amp will speak to you if you give it a chance."

For the most part, your influences aren't from this era. You mentioned Jimmy Page. Who are some other guitarists that had an impact on you?
"Another guy is the first guitar player in Jethro Tull [Mick Abrahams]. But not because I thought he was so great; I actually said, 'I should have been the guitarist for that band. I could have done a much better job.' I was in eighth grade, and I thought the band was lacking in the electric guitar department. This is very important, because I separate myself now from the eighth-grade asshole me. But I distinctly remember listening to those solos and thinking, 'This guy cannot keep up with Ian Anderson.'"

I take it you didn't get into later Tull, when the band became more progressive and ornate…
"No, I don't entertain whims or masturbate in the studio. I think that progressive stuff is probably just a trademark of 70s rock 'n' roll. Bands got more indulgent. Songs got longer and longer, but they didn't get better."

It's impossible to not notice the influence of Nirvana and Seattle grunge in your music…
"It's what I had to work with. I heard Nirvana when I was around 15 or 16. I had been playing guitar for about five years, and I was into The Beatles, Led Zeppelin and Motown – lots of classic stuff. I didn't like modern music – I liked the old stuff. But then I heard *Lithium*, and I was like, 'Wow!' I thought, 'I can't do Robert Plant, but I think I can do this…' You listen to *Sgt Pepper*, and there's no way you can compete with it. But *Smells Like Teen Spirit* sounded accessible, like I could do it, It's like, 'I can mumble. I can scream. Boom – I can have a band.'"

For a lot of guitarists over the last few decades, shredding was a big draw – the neoclassical style of playing that Yngwie Malmsteen popularised. Did you ever get into that?
"Oh, I tried that, but I couldn't do it. The sweeps did me in. If you could do the sweep thing, you were cool, but I couldn't sweep. I just wasn't built for it. So I dug in my heels and got into the blues more. You can play the blues on any old guitar – you don't need scalloped necks and all that stuff. Plus, there's more longevity to the blues. Buddy Guy is still out there, you know? So while my generation went to the pentagram, I went back to the blues."

What were your first guitars and amps? How did you go about researching guitars and gear?
"I had no way to research anything until we got the internet in 2011. Now I'm constantly searching for guitars online. I got this nice Indonesian-made Les Paul copy because I wanted to be Jimmy Page. Then I got this Roland Cube amp for 100 bucks – thing busted within a week. There were a couple of other online purchases. I formed this really loud band, and that's when I got a Memphis S-type. It's a copy made in Japan in the early 70s, and it's brilliant. It's got this Gibson humbucker that some hillbilly put in the neck position, and it's louder than drums. I put that with this Peavey Classic 50 that I got, and I was good for rock 'n' roll."

What about acoustics? You play some acoustics on the record.
"I've got an old Yamaha I beat around on. It's not one of those nice Japanese-made ones. It's an 80s model and I smack the crap out of it. Once a year, I glue the fretboard back down on it. But my nice acoustic is an Epiphone Hummingbird. That thing's a real treat, man. I bought that for myself, and that's my present to me forever."

You started performing as Welles after you moved to Nashville. Was it hard to find the right guys to play the kind of music you do?
"It was difficult, and it's an ongoing. The membership is fluid because everybody has other projects and things. Nashville is crazy – there's so many incredible musicians. You go to any corner and there's somebody who picks better than you. If you ever want to know how bad you are on the guitar, go to Nashville. You'll discover how bad you are in a minute."

You worked with three different producers on the record – Beau Boggs and Bobby Emmett, and you did three tracks with Dave Cobb. Did they have different approaches to recording guitars?
"I would honestly say it wasn't too different. I liked everybody I worked with. I would have liked to have done more with Dave, but he's pretty booked up. He was interesting – he would surprise me a lot. When we did *Seventeen*, I played the guitar solo at the end. The whiskey was out and there was a guitar I my hand, so I went ahead and played it, and I heard Dave go, 'Okay, that's it. That's all you get to do.' I guess he thought I nailed it the first time."

That solo does sound like a first-pass gem. It's almost haphazard in the same way that some of Jimmy Page's solos were.
"Haphazard is always a compliment in rock 'n' roll. A lot of the guitar was direct – straight into the console with a fuzz pedal. Dave and I got into that kind of sound. We hit it off right away talking about The White Album and the Plastic Ono Band. It's funny – people talk about The Beatles, but they mention things like *All You Need Is Love*. But Dave, he got the whole trip. He gets the musical references. I told him I wanted the vocal slapback like Lennon got, and he was right there. I told him I wanted the guitars on *Codeine* to sound like *Cold Turkey*, and he knew exactly what I meant. It was so refreshing not to have to explain anything."

Your main electric is that Memphis S-type. Is there any particular guitar that you're still lusting after?
"I can tell you what I just got. It's what I've been lusting after since I first got the internet. When I bought the Memphis S-type, I discovered that it was made in this Matsumoto wood plant. So I started researching other guitars that were made over there, and that's when I happened upon the Aria Pro II series. They were making them at the same plant in the 70s and 80s. So the other day I picked up an Aria Pro II Thor."

Not many people are looking for those…
"They're not, but they should be. The thing looks like a Strat and an SG had a baby. It's got a three-piece maple neck that runs through the entire body, and it's got a rosewood fretboard. The body is Japanese walnut. It's got two humbuckers, and each one has a coil switch option. The thing's so weird and wonderful. The finish is like a bowling alley. It weighs 10 or 11 pounds, so it's substantial. It's a rock 'n' roll machine. I can't believe how cheap I picked it up for. And it's got 24 frets, too, so it goes all the way."

Whenever people talk about their dream guitars, they usually talk about a '59 Les Paul Burst…
"Yeah, well, this can be my little secret. This is my life, and these are my dreams. I love this guitar. All I need is some Super Distortions in it, and I'm good forever. If anyone knows where I can get some Super Distortions for cheap, let me know. I'll get on the internet and buy 'em!"

***Red Trees And White Trashes* is out now on 300 Entertainment**

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New Music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven new releases

Robben Ford
Purple House

Ford's last studio record – apart from *Lost In Paris*, his spontaneous 2016 collaboration with Ron Thal, John Jorgenson and Paul Personne – was 2015's *Into The Sun*, a positive, collaboration-packed album that saw him challenge his musical boundaries. For this new nine-track offering, Ford's stated concept was to place "a lot more emphasis on the production than I've had in the past". So, what does this more studio-focused Ford sound like?

Opener *Tangle With Ya* is at heart a mid-tempo funk 12-bar, underpinned by gritty drums and an ascending, chromatic riff that's sweetened by some sonorous backing vocals, grimy organ, horn stabs and an off-the-leash solo that sees Ford deliver a masterclass in major-key blues. In similar vein, *What I Haven't Done* plays with time signature and flawless question-and-answer horns, before *Empty Handed* signals a change in style and pace; a reverb-soaked and spacious acoustic alt-country ballad with depth and atmosphere – it's a real departure for Ford and, with its confessional, Laurel Canyon-recalling vocals, textural use of effects and chaotic middle section, it may be uncharted sonic territory, but he proves he can navigate it with ease.

Bound For Glory is further evidence of Ford changing up his approach, pitching up somewhere between a CSNY jam and an Eric Johnson-esque instrumental. It's back to the acoustic on *Break In The Chain*, for a duet with fellow blues pioneer, Shemekia Copeland (listen out for the satisfying filtered guitars in the break and solo); before forgettable ballad *Wild Honey* is rendered more intriguing by the spacious arrangement and expert instrumental work.

Cotton Candy is an uptempo rocker with a slight Talking Heads feel, featuring an octave bassline and tight echo on Ford's vocal and solo adding a feeling of menace and depth. Penultimate track *Somebody's Fool* showcases the raw blues pipes of Bishop Gunn's vocalist Travis McCready over a vibrant, dynamic Southern-rock workout with a Hendrix-y riff, before guitarist Drew Smithers, contributes a visceral solo to Zepp-esque finale, *Willing To Wait* – an expansive, low-slung ballad that ties up all the album's stylistic loose ends into one ambitious package, all set against backdrop of ghostly, discordant reverb tails.

It's refreshing to hear an artist of Ford's stature expanding his horizons while still incorporating all of the ingredients his fans love him for; *Purple* House is a cohesive and creative record that's up there with the best of his recent work. **CM**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Sonny Landreth, Tedeschi Trucks Band, CSNY*

Boygenius
BOYGENIUS EP

'What would Phoebe Bridgers do next?' is a question many will have pondered in the year or so since her debut album, *Stranger In The Alps*, became a critical darling across the globe. The answer is to form a band, Boygenius, with fellow indie stars Julien Baker and Lucy Dacus. Across the six tracks that make up Boygenius's debut EP, it's clear that each member's distinct strengths have combined to become greater than the sum of their already impressive parts. Opener *Bite The Hand* blends Dacus' kinetic guitar with Bridgers' chiming baritone to create a song that's equal parts punchy and ethereal. The Bridgers-penned *Me And My Dog*'s catchy chugging pop is pushed on by Dacus's guitar and jaw-dropping vocal harmonies. Baker's alt-country tendencies contrast somewhat with the styles of Bridgers and Dacus, but *Stay Down* is an acoustic ballad that's layers the grit and gusto to add a wonderful new dimension. As *Ketchum, ID*'s sublime harmonies bring this remarkable EP to an end all to soon, we're left hoping a full album won't be too far away… **JG**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Julien Baker, Phoebe Bridgers, Lucy Dacus, Many Rooms*

Doyle Bramhall II
SHADES

As a southpaw who plays his guitar strung right-handed, Doyle Bramhall II has a distinctive technique. It's audible on *Love And Pain*, featuring an eerie guitar intro spliced with a Rhodes, leading into a Muff-heavy solo with enough decay to convince you it's played in reverse, a la Frank Zappa. Bramhall uses the full power of his black book to get Eric Clapton to provide a solo on *Everything You Need*, with predictably superb results from Slowhand. Talking of friends in high places, they're in no short supply here as Bramhall also pulls in Norah Jones and the Tedeschi Trucks Band on *Searching For Love* and *Going Going Gone*, respectively. The latter half of *Shades* showcases Bramhall's genre-hopping abilities, leaning on garage-blues with Syd Barrett-esque vocals on *Live Forever*, Mellotron and falsetto on the contemplative *Break Apart To Mend* and Beatles-style psychedelia on *Consciousness*. *Shades* again proves that however diverse Bramhall's influences become, he always manages to pull it back to the blues with aplomb. **SR**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Joe Bonamassa, Gov't Mule*

J Mascis
ELASTIC DAYS

While he might have earned scores of guitar disciples thanks to his deafeningly loud sonic chaos in Dinosaur Jr, J Mascis's solo work has shown off the 52-year-old's softer side since 2011's *Several Shades Of Why*. *Elastic Days* is his third proper solo album, and again it's primarily an acoustic affair. There's something about Mascis's permanently laid-back vocal style that suits acoustic balladry just as well as noisy grunge. He also demonstrates an impressive versatility both as an acoustic and electric guitar player. The title track is a gentle, melancholy ballad that recalls some of the best bits of Dinosaur Jr, but also veers into a charmingly restrained bluesy solo, while *Give It Off*'s solo is equally considered, and almost polite by Mascis standards. Another standout is *Sometimes*, with a driving acoustic progression that breaks with a perfectly judged tempo change to launch into an angular freewheeling solo that's all howling bends and scuzzy distortion. There's no reinvention of the wheel here, but there is refinement of his recipe to create his best solo work yet. **GJ**

8/10

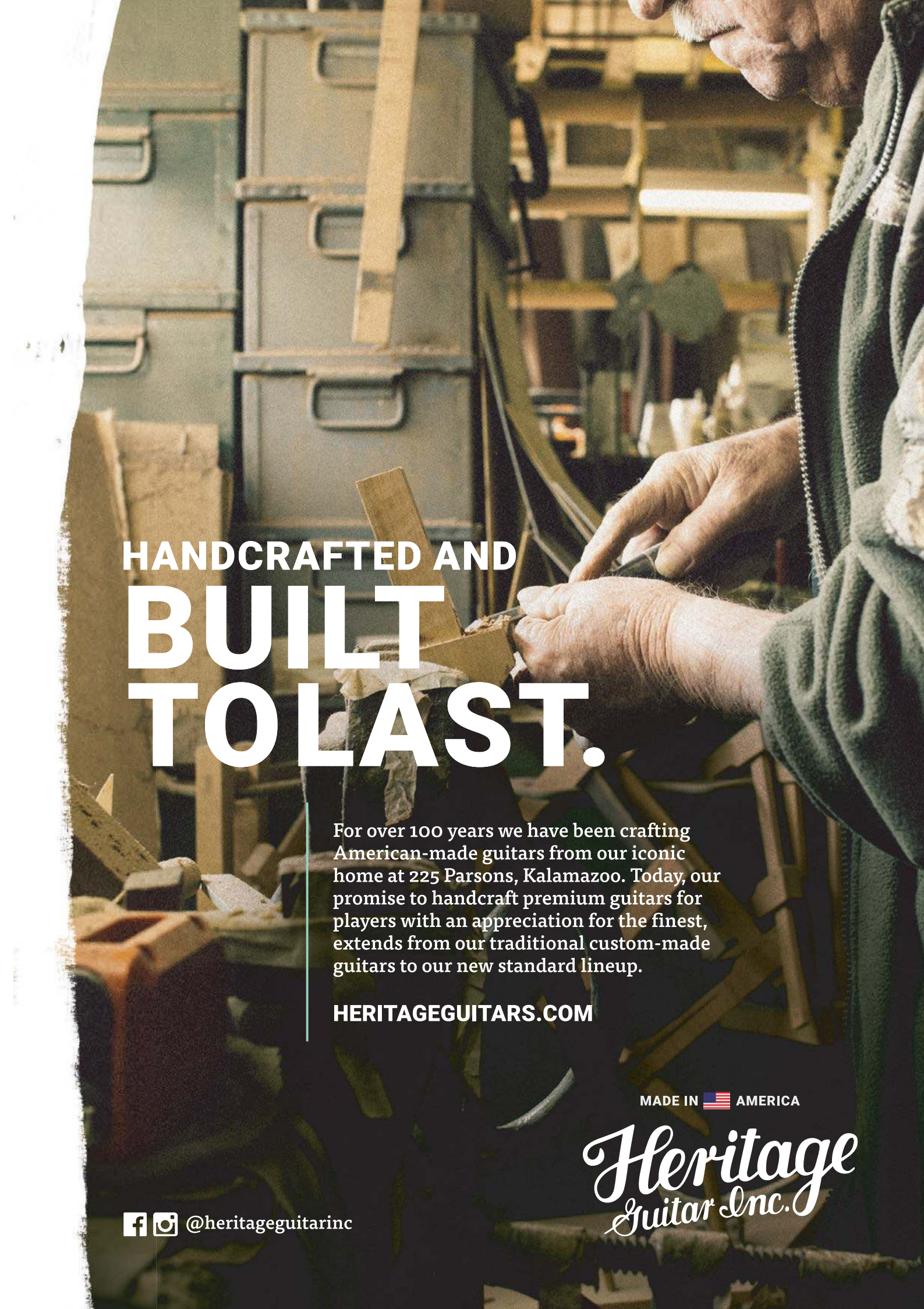
TRY IF YOU LIKE *Stephen Malkmus, Bob Mould*

ALSO OUT THIS MONTH

Our pick of the best of this month's other guitar releases…

Smashing Pumpkins
SHINY AND OH SO BRIGHT
Billy Corgan reunites with original Pumpkins James Iha and Jimmy Chamberlin, but it's not the return to the band's 90s pomp we'd hoped for

Dan Mangan
MORE OR LESS
Canadian songwriter strips it back from his sublimely dense *Club Meds*, and the while results are often engaging, it lacks some of that record's boundary-pushing excitement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Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: Why some smokin' pots are the route to happiness, and won't someone think of the children?

LETTER OF THE MONTH

POT LUCK

Dear TGM, hello from the Netherlands, I just wanted to thank you for your DIY articles. I recently used your Revive Your 335 article [November 2017] as a guide to upgrade the wiring in my Les Paul Signature. What I wanted to discuss, however, is your recent Ultimate Guide To Les Paul Tone [April 2018] and your comparing the various vintage-style pots to an original '54 Goldtop.

Your test had the Bare Knuckle CTS 550k pots coming out as an almost perfect match. Now, I also have a 2006 Hagstom Super Swede which I've have heavily modded already – I've replaced the wiring with 50s spec, and added a push/push tone pot to switch the pickups between serial and parallel humbucking modes. However, in order to get the clarity that I wanted from the neck pickup, I had to install a treble-bleed mod and it always bothered me a little.

After reading your article, however, I decided to remove the treble bleed, and swap the existing pots for Bare Knuckle CTS 500k examples – the result is amazing! The travel in the pots from distorted to almost clean is something I've not experienced before with other CTS pots, and there are so many more colours available using just the controls – it's fab! Keep up the good work!

Robert Siesling, via email

TGM **Thanks for your kind words, Robert. It's always really nice to hear from readers who have taken our advice and had a positive experience! As you suggest, upgrading pots is a simple and affordable way to enhance your tone. We hope your Hagstrom feels even better with your new Overdrive strap!**

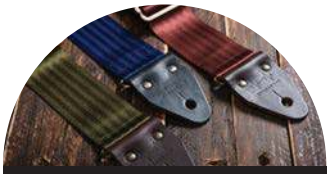
ROLE MODELS?

Dear sirs, I'm writing to complain about your November 2018 edition interview with Phoebe Bridgers, who was photographed wearing a shirt with what can only be described as an offensive comment on the front. I am no prude, but I find no purpose in such a display, and it's disappointing that you did not pick up on this. Many parents encourage their children to develop musically, and to share our interests, but this is one magazine that I'll read and then consign to the bin, rather than leaving it for my 10-year-old granddaughter to pick up.

I'm sure that the young lady in question feels that she is making some point, but at a time when globally women are complaining about unwanted harassment, why? Might I suggest that your photographers take along a spare t-shirt or two, or would that be considered against press freedom? I just find it sad that your standards seem to have slipped with this one.

David Pullen, via email

TGM **Hi David, provocative sloganeering has, both in literal and figurative terms, been part of the subversive fabric of rock 'n' roll from the beginning, and we're not sure that anyone should be telling women what's appropriate to wear here in 2018. Furthermore, aside from being an extraordinary talent, we think that Phoebe Bridgers is an excellent role model for aspiring young artists of all genders. As the interview reveals, the way that she has retained creative control over her artistic vision is something that should be applauded.**



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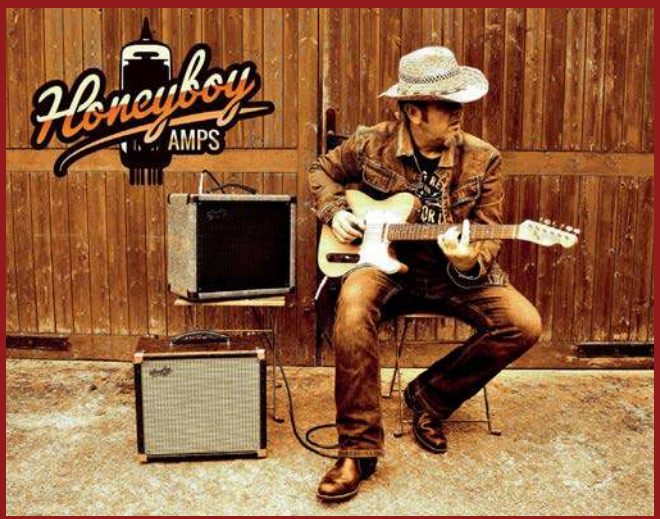

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"Shimmering treble is layered over growling low-mids…our Gretsch has never sounded this good" – The Guitar Magazine

PRIVATE COLLECTION

PRIVATE COLLECTION

TWO'S COMPANY

Carmelo Luggeri's phonebook is full to bursting point with big-name artists that the guitarist has worked with over the years. Lars Mullen explores a guitar collection that has seen action with the likes of Paul Rodgers, Julian Lennon, Bill Wyman, Andy Williams, and most notably, former Elton John collaborator Kiki Dee...

Carmelo Luggeri's guitar journey began when he was sitting on an Italian beach and heard Santana's *Samba Pa Ti* – from that moment he knew that he wanted to be a guitar player, and set about it with some considerable gusto, eventually signing to Bill Wyman's Ripple Productions as a writer and working with the former Stone on various projects, before going on to collaborate with the likes of Julian Lennon, Andy Williams, Paul Rodgers, Chris Rea and Ralph McTell.

For the last decade, however, Carmelo has performed as a duo with one-time Elton John foil Kiki Dee. "I've been a musical collaborator, arranger and performer with Kiki since the mid-90s," says Carmelo. "We have our own studio well-stocked with guitars we use for live work and recording on our own label, so we're pretty much self-contained."

The pair met when Carmelo was brought in to produce some tracks for Kiki on a best-of album, but the late Steve Brown – the man who discovered Elton John – clearly saw something in their dynamic, and suggested the pair start touring together.

"We were delighted and said, 'Who is in the band?' He said 'It's just the two of you!'" Carmelo recalls. "We just thought he was mad, it seemed odd at first after being in bands. I like to think that we turned left! We did a lot of experimenting and we still are today."

ONE LOWDEN

Brown also ended up having a direct impact on the makeup of Carmelo's gear collection...

"Steve said that while I was a good electric player, there was magic happening when I played acoustic," he remembers. "He told me to go out and buy a few

Gibson
SONY

decent acoustics, so I toddled off to the now defunct Acoustic Centre in Wapping, London and bought a pair of custom Lowdens – an O25C with a mahogany body and an O23C with a walnut body, both with cedar tops – and a Martin D-93 160th Anniversary model with all the trimmings including a mahogany body and spruce top. Needless to say, the Martin is gorgeous, and one that Kiki has written many songs on, but since that day, it's the Lowdens that have been first choice for live and studio work.

"The O25C I use for the more delicate fingerpicking, there is some wear now around the soundhole so I fitted a clear scratchplate. I'm not that physical with a guitar, so I still can't figure out how the top of the O23C had worn so much! I use it for the more aggressive approach but it's worn to the extent that the top has started to buckle. I fitted a red tortoiseshell guard for a little protection and maybe to help with the stability.

I talked to George Lowden about replacing the top but he said the cost would be almost as much as a new one, so I bought a backup O25C with the same specifications. They are amazing guitars.

When it comes to acoustics in a live environment, Carmelo adds an unusual item into the signal chain, for acoustic guitars at least...

"I use a Tube Screamer, with the gain wound right back," he explains. "It just gives them a little bit more up front in the mix. I use that pedal on a lot of my instruments, including my little Sherwood eight-string Irish bouzouki, which is also on most of our albums. I fitted an old Tele pickup, and I've just noticed how much the top is also wearing from my fingernails. I'm starting to wonder if I'm a bit of a hooligan player!"

> "HE THOUGHT I WAS MAD TO SHAVE THE NECK OF A PRS!"

CONCERT PITCH

While acoustic guitars are his primary focus when it comes to his shows with Kiki, Carmelo does bring some more esoteric instruments, namely a very unconventional Parker Fly Concert hybrid.

"Ever since I used it for our set on the BBC's *Old Grey Whistle Test* anniversary programme earlier in 2018, I've had a lot of people asking what model it is,' he explains. "They didn't make that many with just a piezo system at the bridge, and I think only in this bronze

Opposite **Carmelo's old ES-335 has been a faithful servant for many years, and aside from the knobs, it's pretty much all-original**

Above left **This 1962 Stratocaster was refinished in a metallic copper colour before Carmelo bought it in the late 70s**

Above right **Carmelo bought this PRS Custom 24 in the 90s and quickly had the neck shaved to suit him**

Above left **A gorgeous custom-order Fender Jazz Bass from the 1970s**

Above right **Carmelo's Lowden 025Cs – both have a mahogany back and sides with a cedar top, but one has seen substantially less punishment**

Opposite top **This Lowden 023C suffered so much wear on its top that Carmelo had to fit a pickguard to save the wood**

Opposite bottom **Kiki's 1974 Stephen Delft acoustic has been through a lot over the years, as its many refinishes can attest**

finish. It doesn't have an acoustic body, of course, but it has a very good percussive acoustic response. Some of the plus points include the individual saddles which allow perfect intonation and tuning, and like all Parker models, it's incredibly stable.

"I know Joni Mitchell uses one with her band. It's one of the few guitars I keep in standard tuning. I've used it to effect on a lot of recordings where you can't tell if it's electric or a real acoustic. It's beautiful, but not a complete substitute for my working acoustic models, and not quite a full-on rock guitar, for which I have many to choose from here, including my faithful '62 Strat."

> "I CAN'T FIGURE OUT HOW THE TOP HAS WORN SO MUCH"

That Strat is equally a little bit different to the norm – particularly its finish...

"I bought it in the late 70s and it had already been refinished in this metallic copper colour by a guy called Sam Li, a well known luthier in London at that time," Carmelo explains. "I've changed a lot of parts, the machine heads and one of the pickups but I still have all the old parts in a box somewhere. I like this colour but often wish it was the original colour, but what did we know back then about Strats being vintage? I saw another '62 just after I bought this one, it was ridiculously cheap, but I thought 'Why do I need two Strats?' Something I regret now of course!

"It's been through a lot to say the least, including being involved in a bad road accident up near the Danish border in 1989 when I was touring with Frank Ryan, who had a couple of big hits in Germany. The car went off the road and rolled over several times. I rummaged through the rubble and the case was really beaten up, luckily the guitar was fine!"

ABSENT FRIENDS

Like many players who have been in the game for a long-time working musician, Carmelo has had many guitars pass through his hands...

"I was using an old Les Paul and this PRS Custom 24 in a band called Rhino Men in the early 90s," he recalls. "It was mainly for humbucker output and

versatility of the coil tapping pickups on the PRS, but for some regrettable reason I sold the Les Paul, which I really missed.

"I bought the PRS new, but I wasn't really happy with the neck profile, compared to the Les Paul, it was far too thick for me. I called English luthier Dick Knight and asked him to shave it down to a vintage Les Paul profile. He thought I was mad to do this to a brand new guitar, but it was intended to be a working guitar and I've never looked back!

"The Strat and PRS handle most of the electric sounds we need on our albums, but now and again when Kiki hands me a sheet of new lyrics, I use other guitars to bring out the best of the song. The track *Useless* on our *Walk Of Faith* album, is a prime example where my dear old Gibson ES-335 was the best choice."

His collection is such that several of the guitars here have yet to see a great deal of use.

"I do have a few electrics here that I've yet to use in anger," he admits. "Like this Duesenberg Starplayer TV, which family and friends bought me for a special birthday recently. I was really wondering how it was going to compare to my favourite Fenders and Gibsons. I was so impressed with the sound and playability. I love the fact that it has a sound of its own."

Above left **Kiki's Daion Legacy L 999 was built in Japan in the 80s and is one of her favourites, while Carmelo's Sherwood eight-string Irish bouzouki has been fitted with a Telecaster neck pickup**

Above right **Carmelo was given this Duesenberg Starplayer TV by friends and family as a present for a 'special birthday', while his 80s Aria SL Series is used mainly for slide playing**

DEE-P CUTS

As 50 per cent of the duo, Kiki has plenty of studio guitar experience to draw on as well, and she struggles to choose her favourites from the wealth of instruments that the pair have accumulated over the years.

"There are so many," she says. "My Yamaha FG-110 has played a big part in my life. I've written so many songs on this guitar including *Sugar On The Floor*, which was from the same batch of songs that I wrote for the *Loving And Free* album that Elton John produced. I took Justin Hayward from the Moody Blues with me when I bought it back in the 70s as I really didn't know what to buy. I think we made a great choice between us, it's more or less used on a daily basis and still in very good condition, unlike my dear old acoustic made for me by British luthier Stephen Delft in '74, which was a gift from Steve Brown.

"The soundboard has split several times – a victim of travelling a lot through different climates, and I think I may have left it in the sun a few times when I lived in LA in the late 70s. Each time it splits, it gets a new paintjob, even with all that paint it has a nice ring to it. I have small hands but long fingers so I'm more or less comfy with most neck profiles and 'board widths, and my Daion Legacy L 999, made by Kamaki in Japan during the 1980s, is perfect for me. There's a beautiful sweet sound happening here and again, it's been on a lot of our albums and a great songwriting guitar. This one was also in the crash and was extensively damaged."

> "MY FG110 HAS PLAYED A BIG PART IN MY LIFE"

Kiki tends to leave the guitar work to Carmelo live, and when they're playing the likes of *I Got The Music In Me*, *Sugar On The Floor* and a "slower, more soulful" version of *Don't Go Breaking My Heart*, he needs a fair number of tools.

"I've tried to limit the number of guitars on stage," Carmelo insists, "But I need as many as eight for tunings like C6, open E♭ and ones I've created myself – all of which can take time to tune to pitch. I've tried to group my tunings to certain guitars for stage work... tuning on stage can be the bane of my life!"

For more information about Kiki Dee and Carmelo Luggeri visit: www.kikiandcarmelo.com

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THE BEST OF **BOTH WORLDS**

Bespoke acoustic luthier Rory Dowling of Taran Guitars tells Mark Alexander how his first foray into electric guitar building changed his mind about plugging in – and may have edged the worlds of electric and acoustic instruments a little bit closer in the process...

"IF I HAD INVENTED THE TELECASTER, I'D BE DONE. I'D BE FINISHED. IT'S NOT GOING TO GET BETTER THAN THAT!"

Rory Dowling loves a Tele. It's the simplicity he likes – the straightforward appeal of a design born out of simplicity. "I just wish I'd invented it," he says. "If I had, I'd be done. I'd be finished. It's not going to get better than that! Given a choice of any new guitar, apart from my own, the first thing I would buy would be a '52 reissue Tele. Yes, I'd go for an electric over an acoustic, maybe because they're intriguing – the forbidden fruit of the acoustic maker."

Sitting in his workshop in Fife, Scotland surrounded by exotic woods and exquisite acoustic guitars, it's hard to imagine Dowling drooling over a straight-up Tele. This, after all, is where earnest musicians find themselves if they've committed to having a guitar made to their exact specifications. This is a place where virtuosity meets elbow grease and varnish.

Dowling's instruments are collaborative undertakings between luthier and musician. An involved process that requires investment, time and patience – Dowling builds around 12 guitars a year, but temporarily closed his order book in 2017. It has since been reopened.

The stripped-down design of a Tele is a million miles away from the bespoke acoustics he crafts from his Scottish lair. With names such as Tirga Beag and Tirga Mhor, these are precision instruments coveted by folkies and fingerpickers. "You get known for building good instruments, but you also get known for building a type of instrument," he explains. Yet despite Dowling's forlorn wish to somehow retrospectively beat Leo Fender to the chase, single-cut electrics are far from what Dowling is best known for. Until now.

GOING ELECTRIC

Dowling's guitars are soulful and considered instruments. They are designed for pubs, clubs and shindigs, for jams, ceilidhs and tours and, until now, they've been exclusively acoustic. That changed earlier this year when the Lecky was born – a set-neck electric with a familiar and deceptively simple layout.

With a mahogany body and neck, single cutaway and a spruce cap, the Lecky was created following a three-year gestation period of detailed discussions, plans

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"BUILDING AN ELECTRIC WAS MORE CHALLENGING THAN I THOUGHT. YOU THINK IT'S TWO BITS OF WOOD GLUED TOGETHER, BUT IT'S NOT!"

and painstaking work. Fitted with a pair of Bare Knuckle Mule humbuckers with a six-way switch and push-pull tone pots, it's the first electric guitar Dowling has built from scratch.

"Building an electric was more challenging than I ever thought it would be," he admits. "I was really surprised at how complicated it all was. When you look at a guitar like that, you think it's just going to be two bits of wood glued together, but it's not. There are five bits of wood just for the body, and then you have the curves. The top is shaped like a dome, so the bridge sits at the highest point of the whole instrument."

Dowling's foray into electric guitar making began when a client approached him about making a unique instrument that would combine all the sonic advantages of an acoustic while producing an electric signal from a smaller body.

"He came to me because I had never built an electric before, and I would therefore look at it in a different way," Dowling explains. "He had been to loads of builders, but they all had an idea of what they thought he should have. I was completely unhindered by the thought of what an electric guitar should be. I don't have preconceived ideas like that."

He continues: "My client settled on the pickup system, which I couldn't, because I didn't know enough about pickups. What I do know is how to make a guitar lively and responsive, and he wanted a guitar that was super active. He wanted a guitar that sounded halfway between an acoustic and a solidbody electric, something with more life than a standard solidbody."

Before the specs for the Lecky were finalised, Dowling visited acoustic maestro Martin Simpson, who also offered up some inspiration. "He'd just bought a replica 1950s S-type. It was flawless. Some guy had built it in his bedroom, but it was mental. I'd never played an electric like it. It played and sounded like an acoustic. It was alive in your hands. As soon as I played it, I knew that was what we needed. That blew me away."

The replica's light ash body with a thin finish got Dowling thinking. "If we want an instrument to be light and responsive and sound like an acoustic, but be

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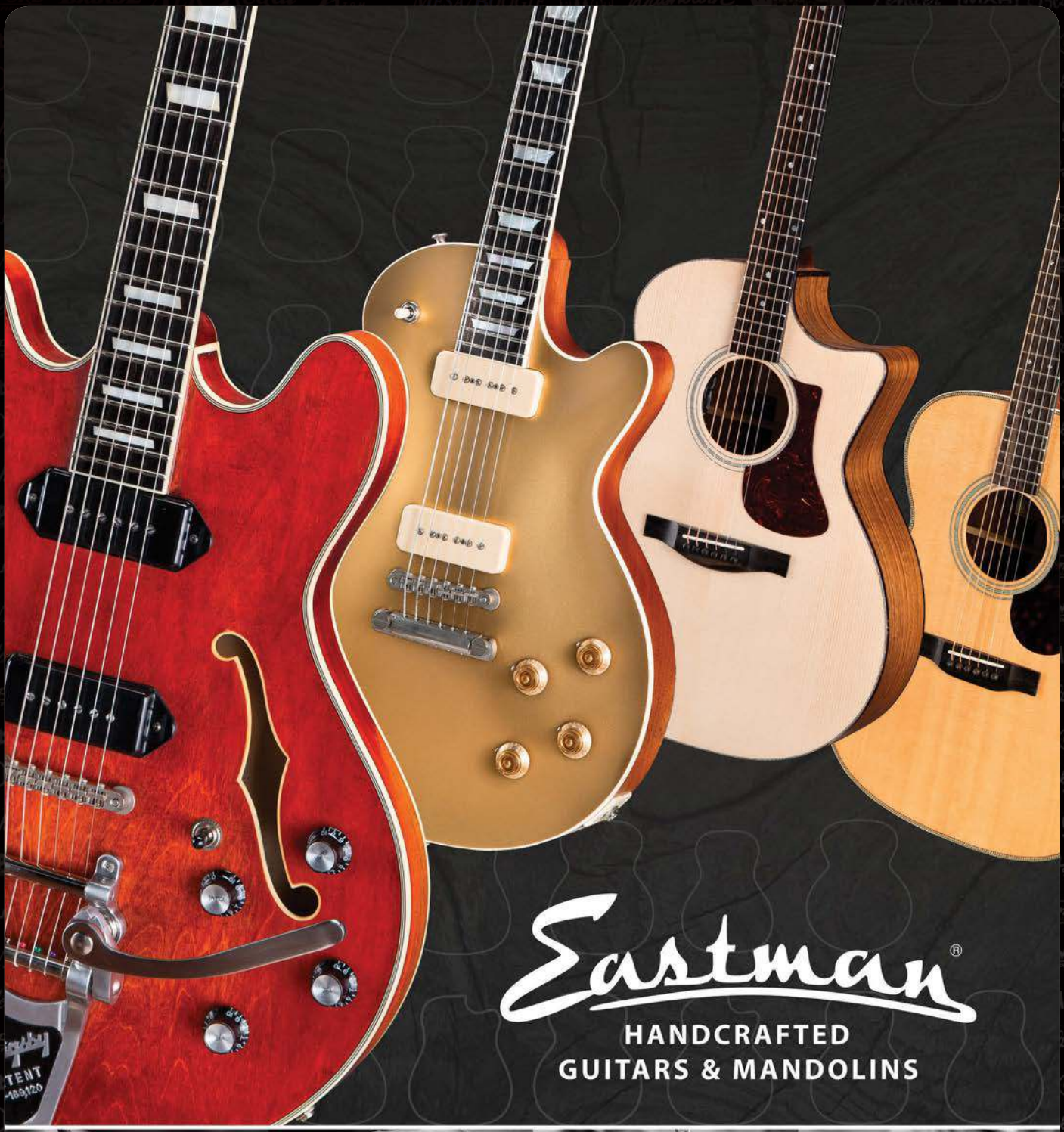

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electric, why don't we build it like an acoustic and make it electric? That's where the idea for the spruce top came from."

ACOUSTIC PRINCIPLES

Dowling's plan was to fuse the worlds of electric and acoustic instruments by creating a guitar with all the sonic response of a hollowbody, but with the playability and convenience of a solid. He decided to build his first electric using the same principles that he would often apply to his acoustics – a floating bridge, solid neck joint and the light-weight strength of spruce. "The top is Swiss bearclaw spruce," he explains. "It is incredibly light, very strong and resonant. The Lecky is a solid instrument, but in construction terms, it's probably as light as you would want it to be."

The back and sides of the guitar are made from Honduras mahogany – known as *Swietenia macrophylla* in plant-y circles – which Dowling describes as, "a very specific type of mahogany, a true mahogany, and the dog's nuts". The binding is Rocklite, giving it a clean and unfussy finish... almost unremarkable. That is, until you strum a chord and feel the resonance against your body. Rather than craning your neck to hear what the unplugged guitar is producing, the Lecky comes alive in your hands.

While the body had to be light and lively, the Lecky's neck had to be steady and secure. "The thing about my client is he is always gigging; out and about on buses and trains," explains Dowling. "Everything I build for him has to be rugged." To secure the neck, a three-piece design was agreed, featuring a slab of Honduras mahogany cut in two, with a middle element of rock maple. "By splitting the mahogany down the middle, you release any tension in the neck," he claims. "The other reason for the laminations is that it strengthens the headstock."

In addition, two carbon-fibre rods and a two-way truss rod were embedded for added stability, while on top, a bound Rocklite Ebano fingerboard with 22 frets was finished with a bone nut paired, fittingly, with a bone saddle.

"IF WE WANT AN ELECTRIC GUITAR TO BE LIGHT AND RESPONSIVE LIKE AN ACOUSTIC, WHY DON'T WE BUILD IT LIKE ONE?"

AIRS & BRACES

Nothing had been left to chance, but to deliver a responsive acoustic experience, Dowling had to move some air. So, while the centre of Lecky would remain solid, on either side, the guitar would be chambered – crucially, from the back – to accommodate the lightness of the spruce on top. With a cap on both the back and top, this is where Dowling's venture into the world of electric design became complicated. "It's a chambered body with a spruce top," says Dowling. "In woodworking, there's a thing called 'telegraphing', where a denser piece of wood will move more than a lighter piece of wood. If I had chambered the guitar in the traditional way, from the top, you would be able to see all the chambering through the spruce. So this guitar is chambered from the back."

To take advantage of a lively spruce top, Dowling had to turn the process of chambering on its head, removing wood from the back instead of from the top. It meant that the spruce cap sits on top of a "full face of mahogany" that has been engineered to ensure it's thick enough to stop the tell-tale signs of telegraphing, but thin enough to make the top vibrate. "Getting those chambers to be the right depth for this to work was bloody difficult. Like *really* difficult."

Dowling may have pushed the envelope to create a guitar that rings, but his efforts were worth it. Rather than producing a focused, targeted sound, the Lecky seems to produce tones that broadcast in 360 degrees. It's a three-dimensional sonic experience, in an unassuming single-cut body that may have a very passing resemblance to a Tele, but it doesn't sound anything like one.

NECK PAIN

The experiment had paid off, although it hadn't all gone his way. "In the future, the neck joint will be a through joint right up to the pickup," Dowling explains. "At the moment, it's a mortise and tenon, which is a really solid neck joint. It's how all Les Paul necks are put on."

He continues: "Originally, the neck joint was like a set-neck Tele, but the client asked if there was any way of reducing the material. I was happy to do it, because

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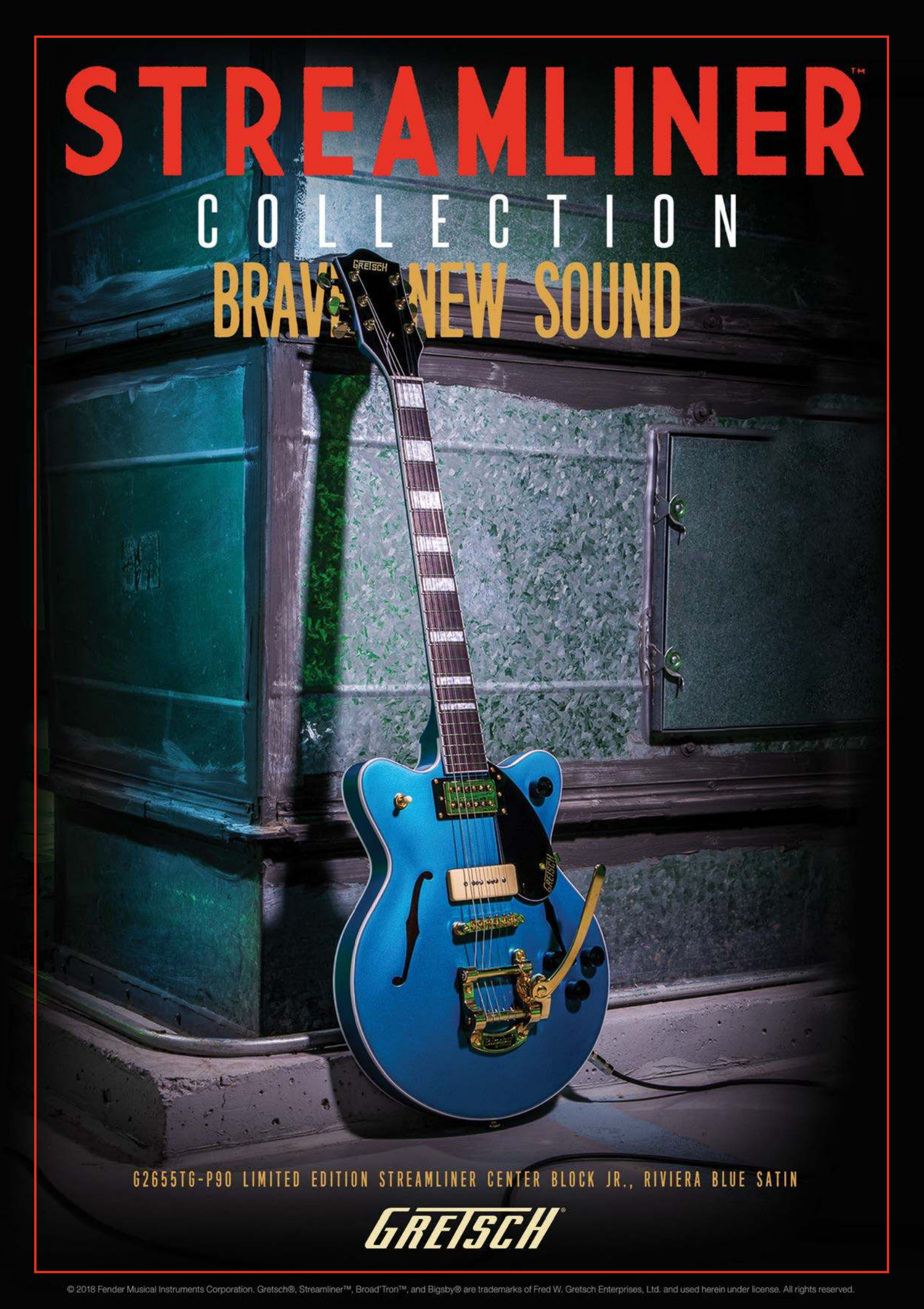

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"I'VE LEARNED ELECTRICS CAN BE GOOD AND BAD, AND IT ALL COMES DOWN TO THE CONSTRUCTION, CHOICE OF WOODS AND THE DESIGN"

we wanted to do it, but it's the one element of the guitar that I find annoying. I have to build another electric just to do that neck joint again."

It might be grinding Rory's gears, but to the untrained eye, the joint works perfectly. Smooth and recessed, it provides ample access to the upper frets and feels solid in the hand. But that's not Dowling's assessment. "There was a design change at a time when it shouldn't have happened, that's what I see. It should have changed on paper, rather than changing the wood. Saying that, I love the sweep onto the cutaway. That's really nice."

Despite the trials and tribulations of building his first electric guitar from scratch, Dowling is satisfied with the end result. "My client hasn't put it down," he says, "and I'm pleased, because it's super stable. It's doing more than he thought it ever would, because of the way it was built. He's getting way more from the guitar than he thought he would."

However, with the glorious lens of hindsight to focus his thoughts, Dowling admits he has had to revise his views on electric guitars. "It looks really simple, but building it was quite complicated," he admits. "I thought electrics were two bits of wood with a neck glued onto them with the pickups doing all the work – like most acoustic builders do! What I've learned is electrics can be good and bad, and it all comes down to the construction, choice of woods and the design."

For those intrigued by Rory's unique instruments, the Lecky commands a price tag of £2,700, which includes a hugely versatile six-way selector and the Bare Knuckle pickups. A simpler arrangement is also available, but with the same commitment to quality and refinement that makes this guitar so special.

For more on the Lecky and Dowling's other guitar builds, visit www.taranguitars.co.uk

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Letters from *America*

GIL YARON

GIL YARON GUITARS

Renowned the world over for his unbelievably accurate recreations of golden-era vintage electrics, Gil Yaron now brings a remarkable attention to detail to his own electric guitar creations. Dave Hunter learns about the Israeli luthier's 'calling'...

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF GIL YARON

Some things can only be achieved 'for the love of it'. Whether it's poetry, painting, or the making of fine hand-crafted musical instruments, the very best work is never done with one eye on the dollars-per-hour ratio. Take the guitars of Gil Yaron, an Israeli luthier who emigrated to Scottsdale, Arizona, in 2015 along with his family. Yaron's quest to recreate the sound and feel of the most exalted vintage electric guitars involved the sort of investment in his time and personal skill set that could never have been undertaken with any expectation of commensurate compensation— and yet he pressed on, pursued what could only be labelled 'a calling', and has delivered hundreds of incomparable instruments as a result.

The Gil Yaron name is likely best known for its appearance on his insanely accurate reproductions of vintage-spec Les Pauls, which are widely considered the finest available at any cost short of a genuine '59 Burst – as well as his meticulous homages to vintage Fenders. In recent years, however, Yaron has moved on to produce original models exclusively, although these are still entirely informed by the philosophy, skills, techniques, and mountains of data that he accumulated in his pursuit of the hidden secrets of the golden-age electric guitars.

KID ROCK

Having played the guitar from an early age, Yaron also became fascinated with what made the things tick, even before his age had clocked double digits. By the time he'd reached his early teens in the late 70s he had accumulated enough skill to land jobs repairing for local guitar stores near his home outside Tel Aviv, doing what he calls "mainly full-scale repairs and partial builds. So that if a neck needed to be repaired, a headstock, or whatever, I had the tools to do it."

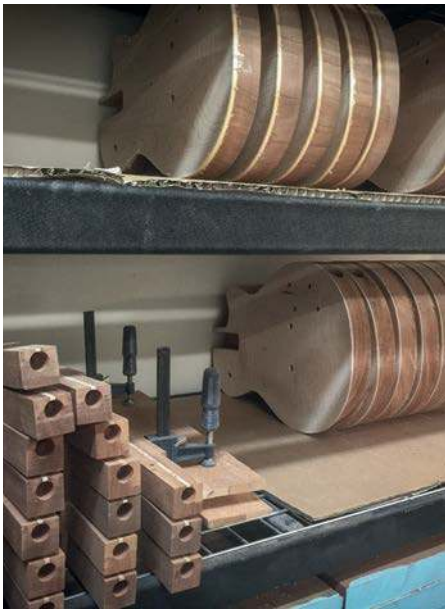
"That put me on the right track for vintage builds," he tells us. "Because a lot of the repairs I did were for Fender and Gibson dealerships in Israel, and the customers had some older guitars as well. I gained my reputation pretty quickly and I was very meticulous with what I did, and people loved my work, even though initially they hardly trusted a kid to do the job."

Following his mandatory military service in Israel, Yaron began his studies at university. At the same time, he was also playing in a band, and the drive to 'make it' eventually lured him and his band-mates west. "We moved the band to Los Angeles in '91," Yaron relates. "But I had to work because I had no money. I had my experience, though, and even though no one knew me, I got a repair job.

"This was really at the core of the business — Sunset and Gardner in Los Angeles, the junction. It's pretty much dead today, but it was super alive back in the early 90s when I started there. This was the peak of Guns N' Roses, and the Seattle sound, and guitars were all over the place. It was crazy. The Les Paul period started with Slash for a while, and he stirred the pot. I started doing a lot of re-tops on Les Pauls, and conversions, and I knew all the people that were in the business back then, the players and so forth. I did most of the work for Guitar Center on one hand, which was a big retail operation, and for Guitarville on the other, which was a little, single-owner vintage-guitar store. It was a great opportunity to put my hands on crazy, expensive, rare Fenders, Gibsons and Gretsches, you name it."

THE BIG ONE

Life in LA was good, Yaron was living the dream – at least as far as the guitarist-turned-first-call-repairman goes – and he was building a reputation among California's guitar elite... and then the Big One hit. The Northridge Earthquake of 19 January 1994 registered a magnitude of 6.7 and caused massive damage in the San Fernando Valley northwest of downtown LA and the



surrounding area. It was a blow from which Yaron couldn't recover.

"I lost my house, I lost a lot of my stuff, everything got shaky," he tells us, "and I wasn't happy staying in Los Angeles any more. Any tremor, I got crazy. I got anxiety, I think. I was just scared, because we got hit really bad. We were almost at the epicentre."

The shock sent Yaron back to Israel, where his experience in LA landed him at the top of the heap for guitar repair in Tel Aviv, while helping him launch a burgeoning music empire of his own. He purchased a recording studio which he rented out to local bands, and a rehearsal space, and was still playing with his band, Mantra, which by this time had toured with Iron Maiden, among others. "Everything was bigger and bigger," Yaron says, "and at a certain point I had to make a decision about whether I wanted to still be a musician and tour and all that. The last tour we did was tough, this was hard, and at this point in time I'd had it with music."

With all else that he had going on, Yaron took a rather surprising about-face from the music business: he returned to university, and earned a degree in software engineering. From there, his progress followed a trajectory you'd expect to see in the bio of any budding Silicon Valley success story, transposed 7,600 miles east: graduates with honours, lands high-paying tech job, develops groundbreaking software, rakes it in on royalties and licensing fees. Until, that is, the guitar bug bit again, and hard.

FULL IMMERSION

"I decided I wanted to go back to guitar building just as a hobby," Yaron says, "because I was about to retire at a very early stage. I was pretty much economically stable at this point, and I'd got married on the way, we had kids, we're talking 10 years later. And at this point I really wanted to get back to building guitars. I really needed the smell of wood, the tools, and everything. I built another floor on our rooftop building, which was a beautiful location. You could see the Mediterranean on one side and Jerusalem on the other, you could see half of Israel.

"So I started investigating something that I always had intrigued me, and that was the difference between the older guitars and the newer guitars. I knew vintage, this was my life, the guitars that I played were always older guitars. This was my thing. And I was just trying to answer my own questions, first and foremost. I wasn't trying to prove a point to anybody, I didn't want anyone to know what I was doing. It was just a fun thing."

A contender for understatement of the decade, that "just a fun thing" involved Yaron undertaking an intensive two-year investigation into every discoverable facet of the construction of the great vintage guitars of the 50s and early 60s, and compiling his own massive database to the end of creative perfect reproductions of the vintage Stratocaster, Telecaster, Les Paul, and ES-335. Rather than trying discern the material differences between new guitars and vintage to uncover the inherent magic of the latter, he figured it was a faster road – though a long one – to just build his own guitars as close to vintage as was humanly possible in the late 2000s.

"Then when I was ready to run the Fender line," he tells us, "I started building guitars just to see the differences, and I have a big collection of originals so I really had the benchmark to A/B to see how I was doing compared to the older stuff, or do the templates correctly and everything else. The results were pretty amazing. It was crazy good.

"Things just went from there. I started building guitars, Teles, Strats, and my friends, players in Israel, they came over and I'd say, 'Hey, check it out.' Or I'd take it to some

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vintage guitar dealers and ask the owners, 'Hey, what do you think?' Everybody went kind of crazy over this. It took two or three months for everyone to know about it. I never advertised, it just spread. I got so many emails from people wanting to order guitars, and I didn't initially want to do this. I just wanted to build guitars for myself just to prove the thing, but I thought, 'Oh, okay, now I don't have a pile of guitars that I'm not going to play, I can just sell them! Yeah, let's clear the house, and I can do more guitars...'"

THE AGEING MYTH

When asked if he unmasked any long-standing guitar myths during this process, Yaron replies immediately: "The first thing was the claim that the older guitars became better because they got older and they became 'vintage'. That the wood kind of matured and the lacquer got thin, the pickups got weak. This was a big pile of bullshit from wall to wall. There's nothing true about any of that. If you go back and listen to the records they used those guitars on back in the 50s and 60s, they sounded pretty awesome back then. You could hear the signature of the old sound back then, so you don't have to be an expert in building guitars to know that. And I knew that already, to a certain extent, but I wanted to prove a point for myself, and it was very easy to prove."

So, if not some mystical ageing process, where does that vintage magic come from?

"It's all about sourcing the lumber in the right places, the same areas that they used to source the wood back then, and you do the exact same everything. The problem is today that you cannot get the old metals or the old magnet wire, or the old lacquer, because the technology has changed, and you pretty much need to remanufacture those things. A big part of the journey was to analyse everything, put it together in a way that I could go to suppliers and say, 'Can you make me this kind of metal? Can you make me this kind of magnet, or this kind of wire?' And some would say yes, then ask for minimum quantities that were just impossible to do; we're talking hundreds of kilograms shipped from wherever. So it took some time just to find the right manufacturers to do stuff.

"Sometimes I had to do the minimum quantity, pay a fortune, and ship maybe a tenth of the stuff. And they were asking me, 'You just paid for a pile of stuff, what do you want us to do with the rest?' I'd say, 'Just throw it away.' It would cost me so much to ship it, and I have no place to store it, and just a tenth will last me five times my lifetime."

TO THE BONE... AND BOLT

Toward the early part of the mid 2010s Yaron, along with plenty of other small makers, received a cease-and-desist letter from Gibson regarding his reproduction Les Paul-style guitars. Although he was still in Israel at the time and believed it would have been difficult for the American guitar giant to pursue a lawsuit, he decided that moving away from the vintage body shapes was the right thing to do. As he puts it: "I figured they were right: they own this model, and they own this shape." The result was his new Bone line of set-neck guitars and Bolt line of bolt-necks, which we might be tempted to describe as 'entirely original designs' if he hadn't revealed to us that the construction of the core models is still entirely informed by their vintage inspirations.

"Everything that is my own model, I cannot take full credit," Yaron declares, "because for example my Bone '59 is still pretty much a '59 Les Paul, with some very small appointments that I change and a slightly different body shape. The truss rod is at the body end to save the headstock, and some other small changes. The core of the sound is still the vintage PAFs, or the Fender early 50s single-coils [on the Bolt models]. The glues are still the traditional hide glue, I still mix my own lacquer with the older materials, all the tools and the manufacturing process, everything is old-school."

The place where the Bone does achieve some impressive originality of design is in the Bone One model, constructed of a hollowed-out mahogany body 'shell' filled with a core of lightweight paulownia wood, capped with flamed maple, and fitted with Yaron's own Air Gap humbucking pickups, for which he has received a US patent. "I'm not pushing myself, I'm not trying to sell those pickups," he says of the Air Gaps, "they only come in my guitars and I make only a handful. But I look at those as a huge step in pickup design, because I keep the vintage tone and maybe better, because now you can adjust everything so the pickup balance is perfect. So this is, to me, one of the biggest things I managed to do."

Otherwise, with his core line-up Yaron feels he is entirely carrying on in a long-established tradition, for which he can take little credit.

"This was not my invention, this was something that had been done by luthiers 300 years ago. They used the same wood, they used the same lacquers. The early Gibson guitars were pretty much old-school, they started as making something that was closer to a violin than an electric guitar, but they still used the same methods. And I do this because I believe this is the right way to build a guitar, not because this is 'the old way'. The plain truth is that to our ears as players, the old guitars, to some of us, are superior.

"And every guitar I complete, I almost want to cry. When I play it, it's like the first one I made. I love them so much... I love them. This keeps me going. Maybe one day I'll grow sick of it and say, 'Okay, that's enough. Let's do something else,' and I'll do something else altogether. But this is a love thing still. Otherwise, I think what I do is very simple. There's not much going on except for just doing it. Building guitars."

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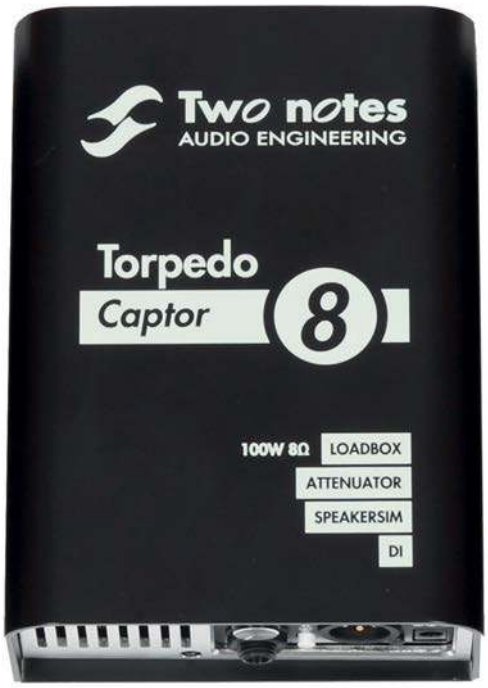

Captor 8

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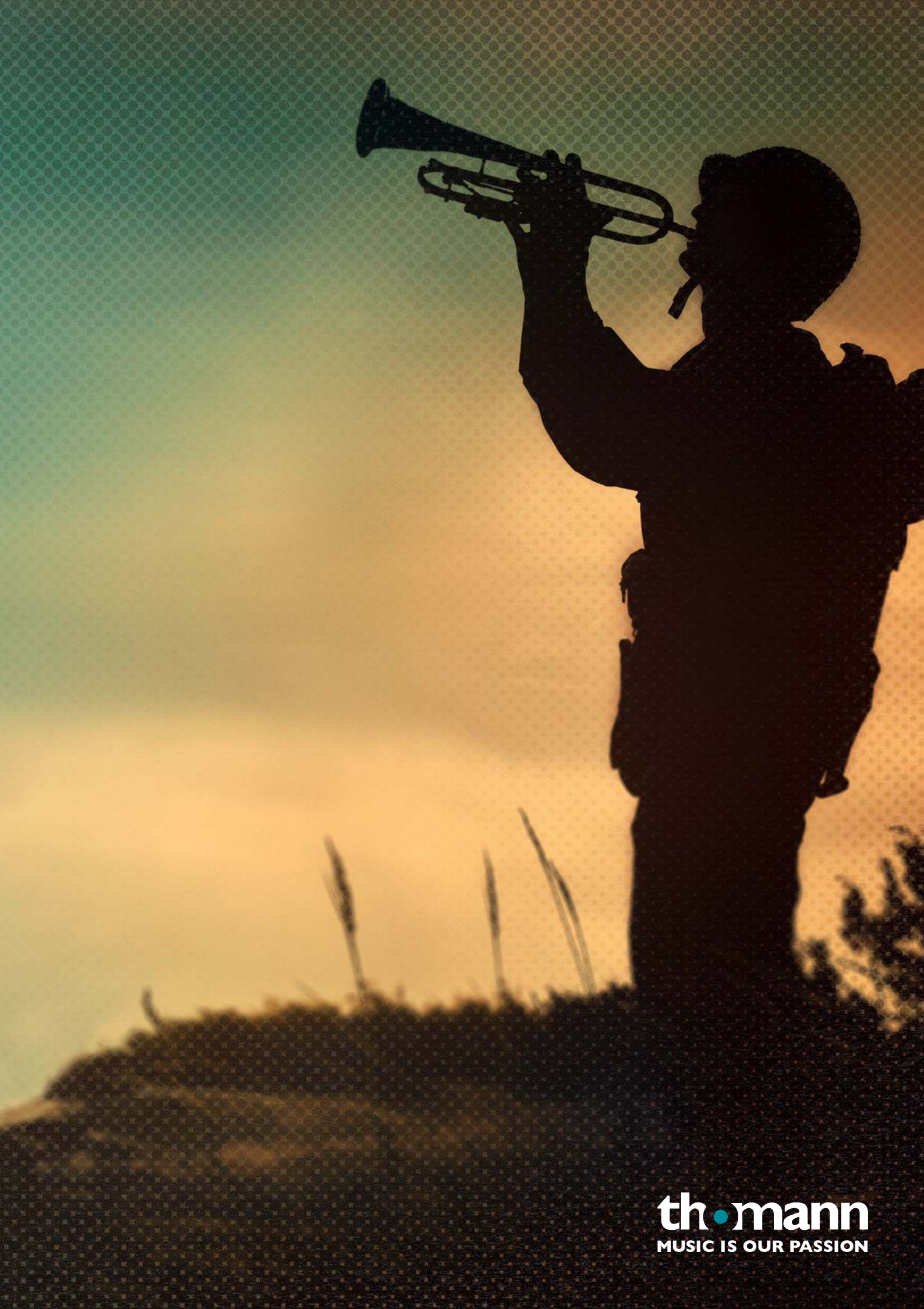
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VINTAGE BENCH TEST

SPECIAL KAYE

Forget your '54s and custom colours, the most collectable Stratocaster of them all is the blonde and gold 'Mary Kaye'. Price gets to grips with a well-loved 1957 model...

-20092

Serial numbers starting with a minus sign followed by '20' are commonly seen on 1957 Fenders

Back in the 1950s, Mary Kaye was referred to by some as The First Lady Of Rock 'N' Roll, so it's no surprise that Fender wanted to get its newfangled Stratocaster into her hands for publicity photos of the Mary Kaye Trio. However, she never actually used the Strat that assumed her name – Kaye was more comfortable with her custom-made D'Angelico archtop, and didn't even own a 'Mary Kaye' Stratocaster until 2003, when she was given one with "To Mary Kaye, from your friends at Fender" engraved on the neckplate.

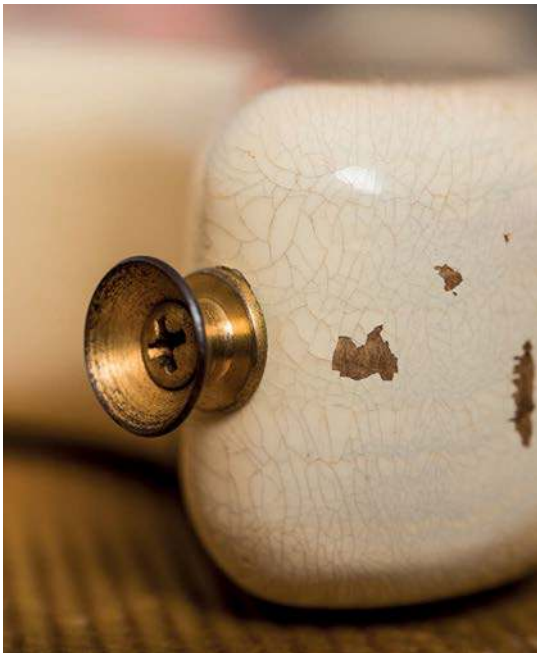
It could have been so different. In early 1956, Fender's marketing genius Don Randall offered Mary (born Malia Ka'aihue) a Stratocaster and a tweed Twin amplifier, recognising that a famous guitar player sporting the revolutionary design surely wouldn't hurt sales. But while Mary was happy to use Fender amps, she politely pointed out that she "couldn't give up my D'Angelico for anything". Ever pragmatic, Randall asked if Mary would at least pose for a promotional photo with the guitar and amp. Mary agreed and later that year appeared with the Strat in a movie called *Cha-Cha-Cha Boom!*, but on both occasions the guitar was taken back to Fender, despite Mary being told she could keep it. She was working so hard, she never chased it up, and Randall later gave the guitar to Johnny Cucci.

Although there are rarer custom colour 50s Strats, the 'Mary Kaye'-spec models are the most sought after among collectors. In essence they are typical 50s Strats, but the defining features are a translucent blonde finish over an ash body, and gold-plated hardware.

KEY FEATURES

1957 Fender Stratocaster

- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody electric guitar. Made in USA
- **BUILD** Ash body with bolt-on one-piece maple neck, 21 frets
- **HARDWARE** Kluson single-line tuners, vibrato bridge
- **ELECTRICS** 3x single-coil pickups, 1x volume, 2x tone, 3-way switch
- **FINISH** Nitrocellulose
- **SCALE LENGTH** 647mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 41.7mm at nut, 50.9mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22mm at first fret, 24mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 34.4mm at nut, 55.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.61kg/7.96lb
- **CONTACT** ATB Guitars **www.atbguitars.com**



Top left **The fine lacquer checking on the top horn is beautifully juxtaposed with the gold-plated strap button**

Top right **The tweed case's metal Fender badge is just about clinging on**

Bottom **The headstock features the rounded walnut plug typical of 56/57 necks and the transition had been made to 'butterfly' string trees**

Irrespective of how many guitar fans now feel about gold-plated guitar parts, back in the 50s it was seen as classy. Gibson had just brought out the Les Paul Custom and the top Gretsch models all had gold hardware, so it must have seemed like a logical step for the Fender company wishing to be seen as credible to serious guitar players. After all, rock 'n' roll was just a passing fad...

THE NECK FEELS ABSOLUTELY BANG ON AND SUPREMELY COMFORTABLE

HANDS ON

The example featured here is in well played but generally fine shape, and it carries a body date of April 1957 with a neck date from the following month. The body shape is exactly what we would expect from a Strat made during that timeframe, with radical contours and a more streamlined appearance than the Strats that came before and after.

Similarly the neck feels absolutely bang on, with plenty of depth but also a subtle V that makes it supremely comfortable and familiar. It really would be wonderful if somebody could crack the CNC router code for some of these 1950s neck profiles, because it's not just the looks and the tone that makes so many vintage guitars special.

The fretboard lacquer shows some wear through in the lower registers and on the treble side around the rollover, but it's almost completely intact on the back and we don't believe it has darkened much over the decades. There's a 3mm gap between the neck and the

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1966 Gibson ES-345 TDSVC
1967 Gibson ES-335 TD
1968 Gibson ES-335 TDC
1956 Gibson ES-225 TDN Blonde
1959 Gibson ES-175D Players

1964 Gibson ES-330 TDC
1967 Gibson ES-330L Burgundy

1954 Fender Stratocaster
1956 Fender Stratocaster totally MINT
1963 Fender Stratocaster Olympic White (2 off!)
1963 Fender Stratocaster body refin
1965 Fender Stratocaster Lake Placid Blue
1965 Fender Stratocaster s/b
1969 Fender Stratocaster maple cap s/b
1970 Fender Stratocaster Blonde
1973 Fender Stratocaster LPB

1953 Fender Esquire
1956 Fender Telecaster
1956 Fender Telecaster body refin
1965 Fender Telecaster Blonde
1965 Fender Custom Telecaster Shoreline Gold..!
1968 Fender Custom Telecaster Candy Apple Red
1968 Fender Telecaster Thinline

1959 Fender Jazzmaster Blonde
1963 Fender Jaguar Blonde Gold
1966 Fender Jaguar Olympic White

1953 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop (2 off!)
1956 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop
1955 Gibson Les Paul Custom
1958 Gibson Les Paul Custom
1960 Gibson Les Paul Custom
1970 Gibson Les Paul Custom
1974 Gibson Les Paul Custom
1973 Gibson Les Paul Deluxe Goldtop
1954 Gibson Les Paul Junior + amp
1959 Gibson Les Paul Junior
1960 Gibson Les Paul Junior

1959 Gibson Les Paul Junior 3/4
1961 Gibson Les Paul SG STD Polaris White
1963 Gibson Les Paul SG STD
1962 Gibson SG Special
1965 Gibson SG Junior Polaris White

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edge of the pocket, but it's butted up tight on the bass side and the neck screws have been tightened so hard, the neck plate has bent and pressed into the body. This isn't uncommon and the whole structure feels solid.

'Blonde' is an imprecise term for a finish that can vary so much, but this guitar's body is somewhere between off-white and a very pale Dijon mustard. It's also slightly lighter around the edges – like a negative

THIS IS AN EXCEPTIONAL STRAT, AND WE'RE KNOCKED OUT BY THE WAY IT PLAYS

burst – and extensive checking lines follow the grain, which is visible through the finish. We suspect this may be a one piece ash body.

No doubt the gold plating here has lost much of its original lustre and the bridge saddles are worn through to rusted steel. It's also interesting to note how the saddle height screws are shiny silver on top while the gold remains below the saddles. Almost all the gold has gone from the neck plate to reveal a copper base layer. But the tuners and pickguard screws are all shiny

Opposite top right **The vibrato arm is one of a handful of areas where the gold plating shows signs of wear**

Opposite middle right **The plastic parts show some signs of yellowing and this tone knob's gold lettering has developed some verdigris**

Opposite bottom **The fretboard lacquer shows some wear through in the lower registers and on the treble side around the rollover**

Above **Wear at the end of the maple fingerboard is typical on Fenders from this era, while if you're ever in doubt about a Mary Kaye Strat, check that it has a gold-plated truss-rod adjuster**

Above **The height adjustment screws retain their gold plating beneath the saddles but have worn through to shiny nickel on top, while most of the tops of the saddles have worn away to reveal rusted steel**

and there are still traces of gold on the truss-rod nut – a unique signifier of an original Mary Kaye.

There's nothing to indicate that the frets and nut are unoriginal, however it does look like the nut may have been removed at some point. The wiring and electrical parts are unchanged, and we're pleased to see the original vibrato arm tucked away inside the pocket of the vintage tweed case.

IN USE

Sometimes collectors of vintage instruments favour originality to the detriment of playability. Although any issues here are minor to the point of inconsequentiality, the one tweak we are unable to make is to the pickup heights. They're currently set too high, but they cannot be adjusted downwards without replacing the rubber spacers, which have perished to the point of solidity.

The seller understandably doesn't wish to remove an original component, but if we were buying this guitar to play rather than keep behind glass, fitting a set of oversized springs with a diameter sufficient to clear the spacers might allow for height adjustment, while leaving the 1950s rubber in situ.

Although we can't adjust the pickups to their optimal positions and hear the guitar at its absolute best, it's apparent that this is an exceptionally good sounding Strat regardless, and we are knocked out by the way it plays. John Mayer insists that there's no reason why a guitar with a 7.25-inch radius 'board cannot have a low action and slinky feel, and this guitar proves his point.

THIS IS AN EXCEPTIONAL STRAT, AND WE'RE KNOCKED OUT BY THE WAY IT PLAYS

Although the frets are low and skinny, we experience no difficulty in getting underneath the strings for precise bends and easy vibrato. We have an alder-bodied '57 Strat on hand for comparison and the ash body delivers a lighter, springier and airier unplugged tone. It sustains just as well, while the midrange sounds a little less forward.

The pickup height emphasises the guitar's inherent brightness, and set like this, their magnetic strength pulls the wound strings flat as you move up the neck. That said, we can hear more than enough to discern that this guitar has all the bite, woodiness and chime you could want for great mid-50s Strat tone. Mary might never have used one, but on this evidence, she was missing out.

Guitar Auctions

AT GARDINER HOULGATE

1933 Selmer “Maccaferri”

1957 Gibson Super 400

1985 Benedetto Cremona

1968 Gretsch White Falcon

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ROGER ROSSMEISL

Most of the people we have featured in these articles have been closely associated with just one company but Roger Rossmeisl worked for Gibson, Rickenbacker and Fender, and along the way, designed some of the most iconic guitars of the 50s and 60s. Huw Price meets the Gitarrenbaumeister...

The story of legendary guitar designer Roger Rossmeisl begins a long way from sunny California, in the north German city of Kiel. Born in 1927, his father Wenzel played and built guitars, and the family had moved to Berlin, where Wenzel played in jazz bands. But with the Second World War looming, Wenzel put his guitar making on hold and the 10-year-old Roger was sent to the town of Mittenwald, close to the Austrian border.

The decision was made for Roger's safety, but the added advantage was that Mittenwald had a school that taught violin- and guitar-making. He remained at Staatliche Berufsfachschule throughout the War, where he gained a thorough grounding in instrument building with an emphasis on traditional hand tools.

Eventually graduating with a Master's Degree and the title 'Gitarrenbaumeister', Roger returned to Berlin to work with his father. Wenzel's guitars were anything but traditional, and in addition to making acoustic and electric Hawaiian guitars, he is widely regarded as the first German electric guitar manufacturer. He named his company after his son.

Wenzel's construction methods and design approach were also innovative. Although he had built fairly traditional archtops before the war, his enforced inactivity provided the opportunity for a rethink. When he resumed building, Wenzel introduced laminated necks and highly distinctive carved tops. Both are significant because Roger would later adapt his father's ideas to his own designs.

MICHIGAN BOUND

No doubt post-war Germany was not an ideal environment for any guitar manufacturer and Wenzel ran into 'difficulty' when he was imprisoned for violating German currency exchange regulations in 1951. Roger was obliged to take responsibility for running the family business, but it didn't go well. Wenzel was regarded as a capable businessman who tended to be frugal. Roger was the opposite and his fondness for the high life ended up ruining the company before his father was granted amnesty and released.

Roger decided to escape his creditors by emigrating, so he wrote to Gibson President Ted McCarty asking for work. His Gitarrenbaumeister diploma proved sufficiently impressive for McCarty to offer Roger a job and pay for his passage to the USA in September 1953.

During his first year with Gibson, Roger designed a jazz guitar but fell out with McCarty, who wasn't sold on Roger's ideas for improving Gibson archtops. There are also reports that there were tensions with the rest of Gibson's workforce, many of whom had fought in WWII less than a decade before.

Perhaps due to these factors, Roger told Gibson he was taking a 'vacation', but instead headed west to play guitar on a cruise ship bound for Hawaii. When he got back to LA he looked up Francis Hall, who had previously been in business with Leo Fender, and had purchased Rickenbacker in 1953.

ROGER SPENT EIGHT YEARS DESIGNING THE CLASSIC RICKENBACKERS THAT DEFINE THE COMPANY'S AESTHETIC TO THIS DAY

TAKING THE RICKY

If timing is everything, then Roger's really couldn't have been better. Rickenbacker had been a family-owned company that enjoyed some success with archtops and electric lap steels, but Hall's association with Fender had opened his eyes to the potential of the electric guitar.

In 1954, Hall hired Roger to work for Rickenbacker and this time he didn't waste his efforts trying to reinvent the wheel. Instead he spent the following eight years designing the classic Rickenbackers that define the company's aesthetic to this day.

The Combo 800 models are regarded as a collaborative design effort between Roger, Paul Barth and Francis Hall, but Roger really

1958 RICKENBACKER 330

1966 RICKENBACKER 4001S BASS

1969 RICKENBACKER 381

1968 FENDER CORONADO

hit his peak during the late 1950s, when he designed the Rickenbacker solidbody and Capri models that would morph into the 300 series, along with the 4000 and 4001 bass models. He would also build custom guitars and personally construct prototypes while working at Rickenbacker. Francis Hall described Roger as "the father of our modern Rickenbacker designs".

If you check out Wenzel Rossmeisl's Roger guitars from the 1940s, many feature laminated necks, with the laminations continuing through the headstock. Extra laminations were used to achieve the necessary headstock width and you often see a sharply carved volute. In essence, they can be considered to be prototypes for the Rickenbacker necks on Roger's designs. Rickenbacker's cast metal tailpiece with a central 'R' motif is another common feature.

However, the feature most closely associated with Roger has become known as the 'German Carve'. It can be described as a rounded and even step all around the top edge of the body that elevates the centre section. It's quite different from the gradual curves of a conventional archtop and it was actually developed by Wenzel Rossmeisl.

GEORGE HARRISON FAMOUSLY USED HIS ROGER ROSSMEISL-DESIGNED ROSEWOOD TELE THROUGHOUT THE 'LET IT BE' RECORDING SESSIONS

The idea came about due to the shortage of appropriate guitar-making materials in Germany after the war – particularly spruce that was thick enough to be used for carved tops. Wenzel would use old floorboards, often laminated together, and some might say the very distinctive look suits solidbodies better than archtops.

The German Carve has certainly influenced other builders, with one time Ricky apprentice Semie Moseley making it a feature of Mosrite guitars and Dennis Fano recently reviving the practice on certain Fano and Novo designs.

Having enjoyed such stratospheric success at Rickenbacker, you might wonder why Roger decided to leave the company behind. But consider how little has changed at Rickenbacker since his departure in 1962. Rickenbacker is a guitar company like no other, and besides a new colour here or a modified neck join there, it has simply carried on producing the same Rossmeisl-designed guitars for decades. Maybe Roger realised there was nothing left for him to do, so a move to Fender made perfect sense.

FLAT-TOPS, SEMIS AND WILDWOOD

Again Roger's timing was perfect when he showed up in Fullerton and offered his services to Leo Fender – who hired him on the spot. Fender's sales team had been pestering Leo for a line of acoustic flat-tops and he saw Roger as the man for the job.

The two collaborated to produce a range of acoustics with bolt-on necks and Fender style headstocks. Fender also applied for a patent for the metal tube that was fixed to the neck and tail blocks for structural rigidity, but it was actually the revival of a pre-war Larson Brothers design.

The range included various six-strings as well as a 12-string with a hockey stick headstock. Fender managed to get them into the hands of numerous stars of the day, but Ray Davies of The Kinks is the only name player who continued playing a Fender acoustic for any considerable time.

A new acoustic model appeared in 1966 called the Wildwood, with a range of colours that might have been more familiar on custom-order solidbodies. Roger had a contact in the timber industry who would inject dyes into growing beech trees. The colours would permeate throughout the trunk and when harvested, the brightly coloured timber was cut into veneer sheets.

The same year saw the introduction of the Coronado models. Designed by Roger, these came in six- and 12-string guises, and there was even a bass version. Like the acoustics, the Coronados met with limited success. If the Coronado was intended to compete with Gibson's ES-335, it was hamstrung from the get-go with a fully hollow body, a bolt-on neck and low output pickups. However they are fine-sounding guitars in their own right – especially the 12-string.

While at Fender, Roger was also instrumental in designing the Telecaster Thinline – or more accurately the way they are made. Like Rickenbackers, Thinline bodies are cut to shape, routed from the back to create acoustic chambers and finished with a cap glued over the back.

A final attempt at German Carve archtops was also made, with the LTD and Montego. With pickups and electronics hand made by Freddy Tavares, Roger's friend and assistant Phil Kubuki explained, "the LTD guitars were made as prestige items, they weren't intended as a profit source".

Although Roger's relationship with CBS soured, the new management understood the importance of product placement and a plan was hatched to make a handful of one-offs for The Beatles and Jimi Hendrix. Roger's idea was to build Telecasters and Strats using solid rosewood for the necks and bodies.

Rosewood is extremely heavy, so Roger opted for two rosewood slabs with hollowed out chambers for weight relief, sandwiching a thinner central layer of maple. Harrison famously used his rosewood Tele throughout the *Let It Be* recording sessions, but Hendrix sadly died before his Strat was delivered to him.

AFTER FULLERTON

Friends and workmates have described Roger as a flamboyant man who liked to live life to the full, always dressed in the latest clothes and had a taste for sports cars. The latter would have a sad consequence, however – he was involved in a serious car crash that left him with severe head injuries. Things were never the same after this moment.

By the early 70s Roger had left Fender, was divorced and heavily in debt. He was so broke that his mother had to pay for his ticket to fly back to Germany in 1971. Sadly it was no longer 'home' since Roger had taken US citizenship, and without German citizenship he struggled to find employment. Roger ended up working as a salesman at the Kaufhaus des Westens department store in West Berlin.

Wenzel's business ceased trading around the time of Roger's return and the elder Rossmeisl died in 1975. Sadly, just four years later at the age of 52, Roger also passed away, leaving behind some of the most distinctive guitar designs of the golden era, none of which carried his name.

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THE REVERB TOP 10

VINTAGE DELAY PEDALS

Everyone loves the sound of a proper vintage delay, but which stompboxes are people snapping up the most? Dan Orkin of Reverb.com picks out the 10 most popular old-school delays sold via the online marketplace...

Every month we look at the global sales data from the Reverb.com marketplace and pick out the stompboxes that guitar players across the world are desperate to get their hands on. This time around we're checking out the best-selling vintage delay units. As with our vintage drive pedal round-up a few months ago, we're defining 'vintage' as any pedal made before 1990.

As you can see at first glance, Boss is the dominant player in this pool with stompboxes from the ubiquitous brand claiming four of the top 10 spots. The sheer breadth of choice can be overwhelming, but no matter what your sonic goals — from subtle slapback to cascading proggy spaciness — these veteran units all offer something that's unique and intriguing, and often overlooked. Sure, there's an almost limitless suply of modern variations on the delay/echo theme, but revisiting the source with an original unit can be a seriously inspiring experience. And vintage pedals are usually a great deal cheaper than vintage guitars!

Two of the entries included here are proper tape echo units, as opposed to stompboxes. That might be bending the usual rules somewhat, but given their ongoing popularity, we think they warrant inclusion here regardless. Sometimes the vibe and organic musicality of these old boxes makes the occasional repair worthwhile.

Seen something you need to add to your board? Head to Reverb.com to search for a great deal

1 Boss DM-2
The first delay pedal offered in Boss' iconic compact pedal enclosure, the DM-2 is a stone cold classic in pedalhead circles. During its original three-year run, Boss tweaked the design slightly and there are now considered to be three different versions, though all are widely celebrated for their rich analogue tone. Today, Boss offers the DM-2W reissue model as part of its acclaimed Waza Craft series.

2 Boss DD-2
What the DM-2 did for compact analogue delays, the Boss DD-2 did for the digital side. In fact, the DD-2 was the first digital delay pedal ever produced when it was released in 1983 and set a template that is still being iterated upon with the DD series today. It was replaced later in the decade by the DD-3, though many claim that the DD-2 has a more organic tone compared to its heirs.

3 Roland RE-201 Space Echo
The most popular tape delay on Reverb, the Roland RE-201 is up with there with the Binson Echorec and Maestro Echoplex in the pantheon of classic tape delays. The Space Echo's list of adherents is long, but for many modern guitarists, it's Radiohead's Jonny Greenwood who is most closely associated with this model. For those who don't want to contend with the fragility of tape, Boss offers RE-20 Space Echo, which replicates this machine in a digital pedal format.

4 Ibanez AD-9
The AD-9 is essentially the Ibanez equivalent of the Boss DM-2, right down to the pink/purple box. It follows the same three-knob layout as the DM-2, but has a reputation for more organic-sounding repeats. The AD-9 is part of Ibanez's legendary '9' series of pedals, which also includes the venerable TS-9 Tube Screamer and CS-9 chorus.

5 Boss DD-3
The DD-3 replaced the DD-2 as Boss's primary digital delay pedal and in its early run was essentially the same design. This pedal is still in production today, though Boss has revised the circuit a few times during its run. It's the original, Made-in-Japan DD-3s that are most sought after by Boss aficionados, however.

6 Maestro Echoplex EP-3
Designed by hugely influential engineer Mike Battle, the EP-3 was the first solid-state entry in the Echoplex tape delay series. Apart from the enchanting tones of its tape-based delay mechanism, the EP-3 is also acclaimed for its preamp section which serves as the basis of the massively popular EP Booster preamp pedal currently made by Xotic.

7 Boss DM-3
The Boss DM-3 iterated on the DM-2 delay design with a few internal tweaks but an overall similar setup and circuit. While a bit cheaper than the DM-2 on the used market, there are plenty of players who give the tone of the DM-3 higher marks, with many citing the somewhat cleaner nature of its repeats.

8 MXR Analog Delay
This large box delay from MXR was an early example of the three-knob template that would be found on countless delay pedals to follow. This pedal finds its modern day descendant in the form of the MXR Carbon Copy which currently ranks as the best-selling delay pedal across the entire market.

9 DOD Delay FX90
The FX90 was DOD's take on the standard three-knob analogue delay as seen on several other pedals on this list. While it went through a series of design updates during its production run, this pedal relied on the same MN3005 chip found on the first version of the Boss DM-2. These days, original FX90s are cheaper than their Boss counterparts making this something of a hidden gem.

10 Electro-Harmonix Deluxe Memory Man
EHX produced a few different versions of the Memory Man in the 70s and early 80s, and the company's current catalogue includes seven modern entries in the series. The Deluxe Memory Man of EHX's original run is probably most well-known for its association with The Edge of U2, one of the foremost exponents of delay in rock history.

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EASTMAN SB56/N & SB57/N

Eastman's vintage-style single-cut range was expanded this year to include Goldtop and Black Beauty inspired models. Huw Price mingles with a pair of singles...

This isn't the first time we've featured Eastman's take on the single-cut solidbody theme, and these two models are similarly 50s-inspired. Crafted in China in a factory with a long history of instrument building, the specifications of these guitars greatly exceed expectations at this price point.

Both instruments ship with hard shell cases and feature one-piece mahogany necks and bodies, with carved maple caps and bound ebony fingerboards. The latter neatly circumvents any CITES headaches with regard to rosewood but as we have come to expect from Eastman, it's top quality.

The 'boards themselves have immaculate pearl inlays and the Jescar medium-jumbo fretwire (installed sans binding nibs) is highly regarded. Most of the Eastman models that we've seen so far have had French-polished Antique Varnish finishes derived from the violin-making side of the business, but the company also uses nitrocellulose. The 'Vintage Nitro' here isn't relic'd as such, but the finish hasn't been cut and polished in the usual way and the satin feel recalls Fender's earliest Highway One models.

The SB56's distinguishing features include Lollar Custom Aged Soapbar P-90 pickups with an underwound neck unit, single-ply body and 'board binding and nickel-plated hardware. We like the 50s-style mounting for the pickup selector with no 'poker chip'.

EASTMAN'S BLACK 'VINTAGE NITRO' FINISH AND EXPERTLY AGED GOLD HARDWARE REALLY SUIT THE SB57

The hardware is high quality, with Gotoh bridges, aluminium tailpieces and vintage-style tuners, and it's all tastefully aged. Inside the control cavity we see CTS potentiometers and 0.047uF Sprague Orange Drop tone capacitors. The wiring is expertly done, while the pots are actually 500K rather than the 250K specified on Eastman's website.

The dulled-down black finish and expertly aged gold hardware really suit the SB57 and the slightly tinted lacquer over the multi-ply body, neck and headstock binding is a nice touch. This time we have a set of Lollar Custom Aged/Wound Imperial Humbuckers and the stylised pearl diamond inlay on the headstock looks a treat.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The Maybach Lester Gold Rush 90 (£1,732) has a two-piece mahogany body, rosewood fingerboard and Amber Spirit P-90s. Alternatively you can shake things up with a Bigsby equipped **Maybach Lester 54 Custom** (£2,032) with P-90 and Staple pickups. **The B&G Little Sister Crossroads** (£1,550) has a chambered body and comes with P-90s or Humbuckers in a choice of black or sunburst finishes

KEY FEATURES

Eastman SB56/n

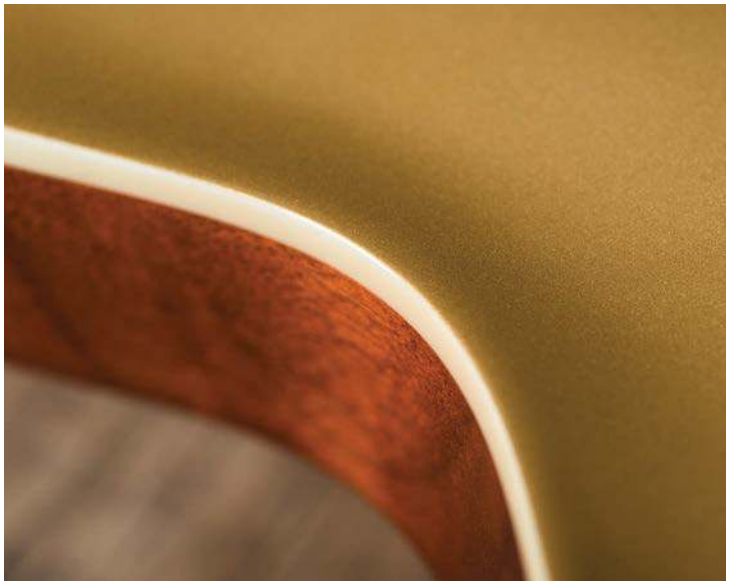
- **PRICE** £1,769 (inc hard case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody electric guitar. Made in China
- **BUILD** One-piece mahogany body with carved maple cap, one-piece mahogany neck with single-action trussrod, bound ebony fingerboard, ebony peghead overlay, bone nut
- **HARDWARE** Gotoh SD90 tuners, GE104B tune-o-matic bridge & GE101A aluminium stop tailpiece
- **ELECTRICS** Lollar Custom Aged Soap Bar P-90s, CTS potentiometers (2x volume, 2x tone), Switchcraft 3-way toggle switch, Sprague Orange Drop capacitors
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISH** 'Vintage Nitro' satin nitrocellulose
- **SCALE LENGTH** 628mm/24.75"
- **NECK WIDTH** 43mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 21mm at first fret, 23mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 37mm at nut, 51.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.6kg/7.9lb
- **CONTACT** Eastman Musical Instruments **www.eastmanguitars.com**

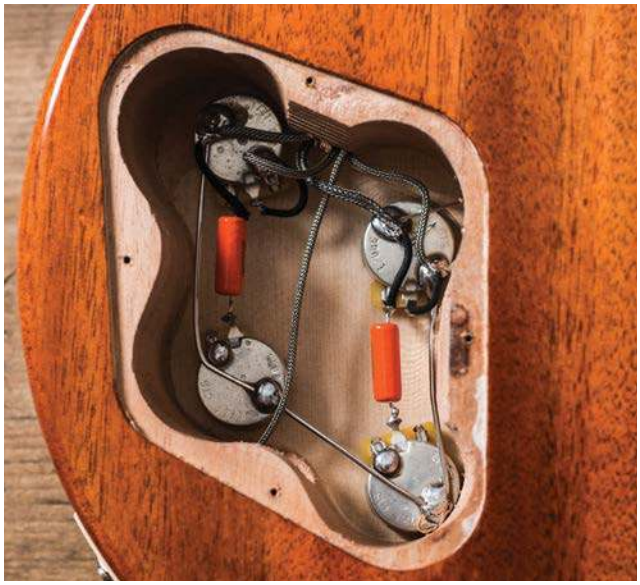
IN USE

We'll get into the electronics side of things later on, but before we do, it's worth discussing the subtle differences between the unplugged tones on offer here. Both guitars are certainly lively ones, with vibrations that transmit through the body and into your chest. The acoustic sustain promises great things and these are naturally loud guitars.

However, the SB56's chiming sprang is in definite contrast to the SB57's smoother and slightly warmer tone. The SB57 also has a touch more of the woody midrange resonance that we'd normally associate with vintage Les Pauls and the best modern guitars of their ilk. Either way it's an encouraging start for both models, but if pushed we'd say that we slightly prefer the black guitar's unplugged tone.

As you might expect, the weights and general playing feel of both instruments are more or less identical, too, and this is one area where Eastman steals a march on some of the competition. As LP-style guitars go, these are relatively light despite having solid, one-piece mahogany bodies. This is an indication that the Eastman factory is sourcing its wood with great care, and we've mentioned in previous issues that the high volume of violins it produces gives





the company considerable buying power when it comes to timber.

Better still, the neck profile on both guitars feels excellent. It's full without being bulky and there's no discernible shoulder. Viewed square on from behind these necks ace our 'can you still see the binding?' test, and if this is an attempt to replicate a late-50s Gibson feel, it's a job well done. Our only gripe is the abrupt and truncated heel carve, which acts more like a buffer than something that will ease into your palm as you attempt to wail away on the upper frets.

Kicking off with the SB56, the Lollar P-90s sound like a modern twist on the 50s formula. The bridge produces a thrilling 'brrrang' through a cranked valve amp and the underwound neck unit contributes a smoother and mellower tone. We always look for contrast with 50s inspired single-cuts and the Lollars certainly deliver.

THERE'S A HUGE RANGE OF CLASSIC TONES ON OFFER, NOT LEAST BECAUSE VOLUME CLEAN-UP WORKS REALLY WELL

Pick attack is precise and the lows are well defined, but like a lot of high-end, modern P-90-style pickups, these are somehow brighter but less clear sounding than vintage examples and the very finest replicas. The review guitar doesn't have foam or springs beneath the pickups so it's not possible to adjust their heights relative to the strings without taking everything apart, but we think the tone and balance would

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- **WEIGHT** 3.7kg/8.1lb

benefit from lowering the bridge unit and raising the neck.

Even so, there's a huge range of classic tones on offer, not least because volume control clean-up works really well and is very much in line with our experience of vintage Gibsons. If the tone control wiring was altered to 50s-style layout, we think things could be even better.

Whether it's attributable to the SB57's acoustic character or the humbuckers is hard to say, but while the SB56 gives a tantalising taste of vintage tone, the 57 really lays it on thick and creamy. It may not be quite as raucous as the 56 but it's just as powerful and much more sophisticated.

The bridge pickup has brightness and just enough midrange quack. The neck is both smoother and sweeter with a pleasing hint of treble sparkle, and in the middle setting you can notch back the neck volume to emphasise the phasiness.

But the real magic must be a combination of all the factors because it has an uncanny ability to sustain notes and it manages a bit of harmonic bloom, too. It's an expressive and dynamic instrument for soloing that really sings, but also delivers huge and crunchy power chords. We find it equally adept at the clean stuff as the neck setting produces a fine jazz tone and the bridge takes on a surprisingly countrified flavour.

There's little doubt that these guitars would sound even more old-school if the pickups weren't wax-potted, but the tones are excellent nonetheless. That said, the tone controls aren't the most responsive, they don't really kick in until they're backed off to around two, and at zero all definition is lost.

However, we're assured that the review guitars are prototypes and that the production models will have improved tone pots with better tapers. In all other respects, these guitars give you vintage-inspired playability and tone with all the desirable features at a relatively affordable price.

WHILE THE SB56 GIVES A TANTALISING TASTE OF VINTAGE TONE, THE 57 REALLY LAYS IT ON THICK AND CREAMY

The Guitar Magazine **VERDICT**

EASTMAN SB56/N

+ Vintage P-90 tone with modern bite
+ Excellent playability
+ Rock solid tuning

– Pickups lack clarity

A lightweight electric with vintage playing feel that adds a touch more cut and aggression to the old-school Goldtop vibe

8/10

The Guitar Magazine **VERDICT**

EASTMAN SB57/N

+ Fabulous sustain
+ Convincing vintage tonality
+ Excellent playability
+ Rock solid tuning

– Heel carve could be more elegant

Maybe it's the pickups or maybe it's the wood, but this guitar has classic tone in spades

9/10

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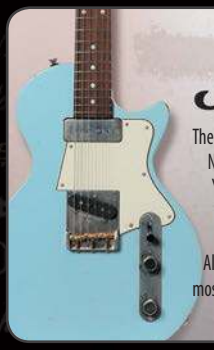

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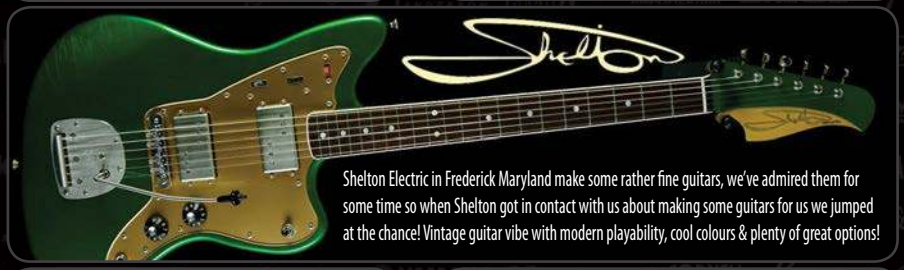

Shelton Electric in Frederick Maryland make some rather fine guitars, we've admired them for some time so when Shelton got in contact with us about making some guitars for us we jumped at the chance! Vintage guitar vibe with modern playability, cool colours & plenty of great options!

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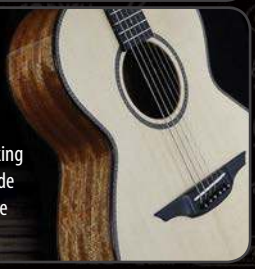
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XOTIC CALIFORNIA CLASSIC XSC-1 & XSC-2

You may know the brand's stompboxes, but Californian brand Xotic has a history of making high-quality electric guitars, too. Chris Vinnicombe sees double...

You'll likely be familiar with the Xotic brand name because of the Southern Californian company's effects pedals. Over the last decade, overdrive and boost stompboxes such as the EP Booster and BB Preamp have become pedalboard staples for pros and weekend warriors alike. However, the firm's roots stretch back to 1996, when it was a one-man operation that saw Hiro Miura producing high-quality bass guitars with onboard preamps in a garage in the San Fernando Valley.

Miura left to found Miura Guitars in 2014, but the following year Xotic – under the auspices of parent company Prosound Communications Inc – began hand-building electric guitars in a workshop in Los Angeles County. Now available in the UK via Peach Guitars in Colchester, Xotic's California Classic XSC Series takes unashamed inspiration from the Golden State's most famous electric guitar, but adds a few twists to the familiar recipe.

Most noticeable of these twists is the gorgeous heavily flamed, roasted (aka torrefied) and oil-finished maple that Xotic uses for its substantial modern C-shaped necks. It feels (and smells!) as good as it looks and lends a sumptuous boutique vibe to instruments that otherwise embrace the factory distressed aesthetic. The fingerboards offer a comfortable ride too: both of our review guitars feature attractive slabs of rosewood with rolled edges and rounded fret ends.

The Gotoh Locking Vintage tuners with staggered posts favoured by Xotic dispense with the need for string trees, but truss-rod adjustment takes place down at the body end, so you'll have to unscrew the neck to tweak the relief. Like Suhr and Tom Anderson, Xotic has opted for a headstock shape that balances aesthetically with the classic double-cutaway body shape, but keeps the lawyers at bay.

THE MOST NOTICEABLE TWIST IS THE FLAMED, ROASTED AND OIL-FINISHED MAPLE XOTIC USES FOR ITS NECKS

Both guitars also feature Gotoh vintage-style vibrato bridges fitted with steel saddles by Xotic's sister parts-brand, Raw Vintage, claimed to be the result of molecular analysis of original 1950s saddles and manufactured in the same way. Bridge and saddle material has a huge influence on a guitar's sonic signature, so attention to detail in this area bodes well.

The more traditionally appointed XSC-1 is finished in nitro in Three-Tone Sunburst and loaded with a trio of RV-60 single-coils. The pickups are also badged as Raw Vintage and hand-wound in the same LA workshop in which the guitars are built. The XSC-2's 'burst has been sprayed over with Shell Pink and beefed up with a nickel-covered RV-PAF humbucker in the bridge position.

In keeping with its hot-rodded vibe, the pink guitar also features taller and wider Jescar fretwire than its sibling (0.057-inch high and 0.110-inch wide crowns versus 0.047 and 0.104) and a flatter 12-inch fingerboard radius in contrast to the sunburst guitar's 9.5-inch camber.

Under close inspection, the medium (XSC-1) and heavy (XSC-2) aged paint-jobs on display here are a little too clean to pass for the real thing, lacking the oxidised bare wood

KEY FEATURES
XOTIC CALIFORNIA CLASSIC XSC-1

- **PRICE** £2,899 (inc hardshell case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody double-cutaway electric guitar. Made in USA
- **BUILD** Alder body, bolt-on roasted flame maple neck with 9.5" rosewood fingerboard, 22 Jescar 47104 frets, bone nut, mint green 3-ply scratchplate
- **HARDWARE** Gotoh vintage-style vibrato bridge with Raw Vintage steel saddles, Gotoh vintage-style locking staggered tuners
- **ELECTRICS** 3x Raw Vintage RV-60 single coils, master volume, 2x tone, 5-way blade pickup selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/648mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.8mm at nut, 52.0mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21.5mm at first fret, 24.2mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 34.6mm at nut, 55.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 7.6lb/3.4kg
- **FINISH** 3-Tone Sunburst nitrocellulose (body), oiled neck
- **CONTACT** Peach Guitars **peachguitars.com** **xotic.us**

KEY FEATURES

XOTIC CALIFORNIA CLASSIC XSC-2

- **PRICE** £3,099 (inc hardshell case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody double-cutaway electric guitar. Made in USA
- **BUILD** Alder body, bolt-on roasted flame maple neck with 12-inch rosewood fingerboard, 22 Jescar 57110 frets, bone nut, 3-ply brown tortoise scratchplate
- **HARDWARE** Gotoh vintage-style vibrato bridge with Raw Vintage steel saddles, Gotoh vintage-style locking staggered tuners
- **ELECTRICS** 1x RV-PAF humbucker, 2x Raw Vintage RV-60 single coils, master volume, 2x tone, 5-way blade pickup selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/648mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.9mm at nut, 52.3mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21.5mm at first fret, 24.5mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 34.7mm at nut, 55.4mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 7.8lb/3.5kg
- **FINISH** Shell Pink over Three-Tone Sunburst (body), oiled neck

and sheer grime you'd find on a well-played vintage instrument. Although Xotic has kept the lacquer checking subtle and at least noticed that most vintage nitro finishes are still pretty glossy, it's a less sophisticated effort overall than we've seen recently in the stateside boutique market from the likes of Friedman and Novo, and indeed from Fender's own Custom Shop Relics.

That said, both instruments in our Xotic duo are on the right side of eight pounds and feature tight neck pockets and resonant, well-seasoned timbers. Strummed acoustically the vital signs are good, with a pleasing mixture of zing and woodiness, while the vibrato bridges are smooth and well-behaved. Time to find out what happens to those ingredients when we add electricity…

IN USE

Compared to our reference Custom Shop Strat (a '56 Heavy Relic with a maple board and ash body) the rosewood 'board/alder body Xotic XSC-1 doesn't sound woodier, necessarily, but it is noticeably smoother. It's a more 'produced' version of the same fundamental guitar tone, but there's still no shortage of glistening harmonics and explosive dynamics under the fingers. Having a tone control on the bridge pickup helps add muscle with overdrive, too.

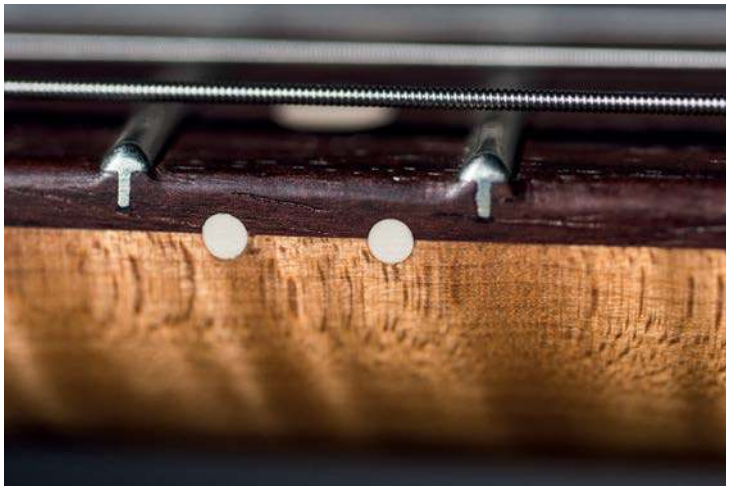
The Gotoh locking tuners with their staggered posts may look like 1950s-spec from a distance, but in practice they improve the break angle of the strings over the nut and eliminate the need for friction-inducing string trees. This means that aggressive whammy bar use and huge bends are less likely to cause tuning woes.

If you can't get through a bar without giving things a wobble or shimmer, you'll enjoy the fact that there's also much less unwanted play in the vibrato arm than is typical with both the stock vintage design and many of its imitators. Again we're travelling in business class here rather than rattling around in economy or having to compromise for the sake of authenticity.

Switching over to the XSC-2, we're treated to a very similar palette of classic Strat-style tones, augmented this time by a little extra heat and compression from the humbucker at the bridge. The clue is in the name, but the RV-PAF serves up plenty of clarity and bite along with its raunch.

We're often underwhelmed by the back pickup in a HSS configuration, but here it seems like less of a blunt instrument. Not only does the Raw Vintage humbucker balance well with the single-coil pickups in the XSC-2's middle and neck positions, but in practice it means that you can take one guitar to the gig, cover a lot of sonic bases and sound pretty damn good in the process.

Guitars that aspire to fix the perceived shortcomings of, or add versatility to, the vintage Strat blueprint aren't exactly scarce in the Fender catalogue, let alone in the wider world of boutique electrics. Yet there's something about these Xotics that feels a little classier than most pretenders, resulting in the impression that they've been given some thought and love where it counts, as opposed to being thrown together hastily from parts bins.



LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

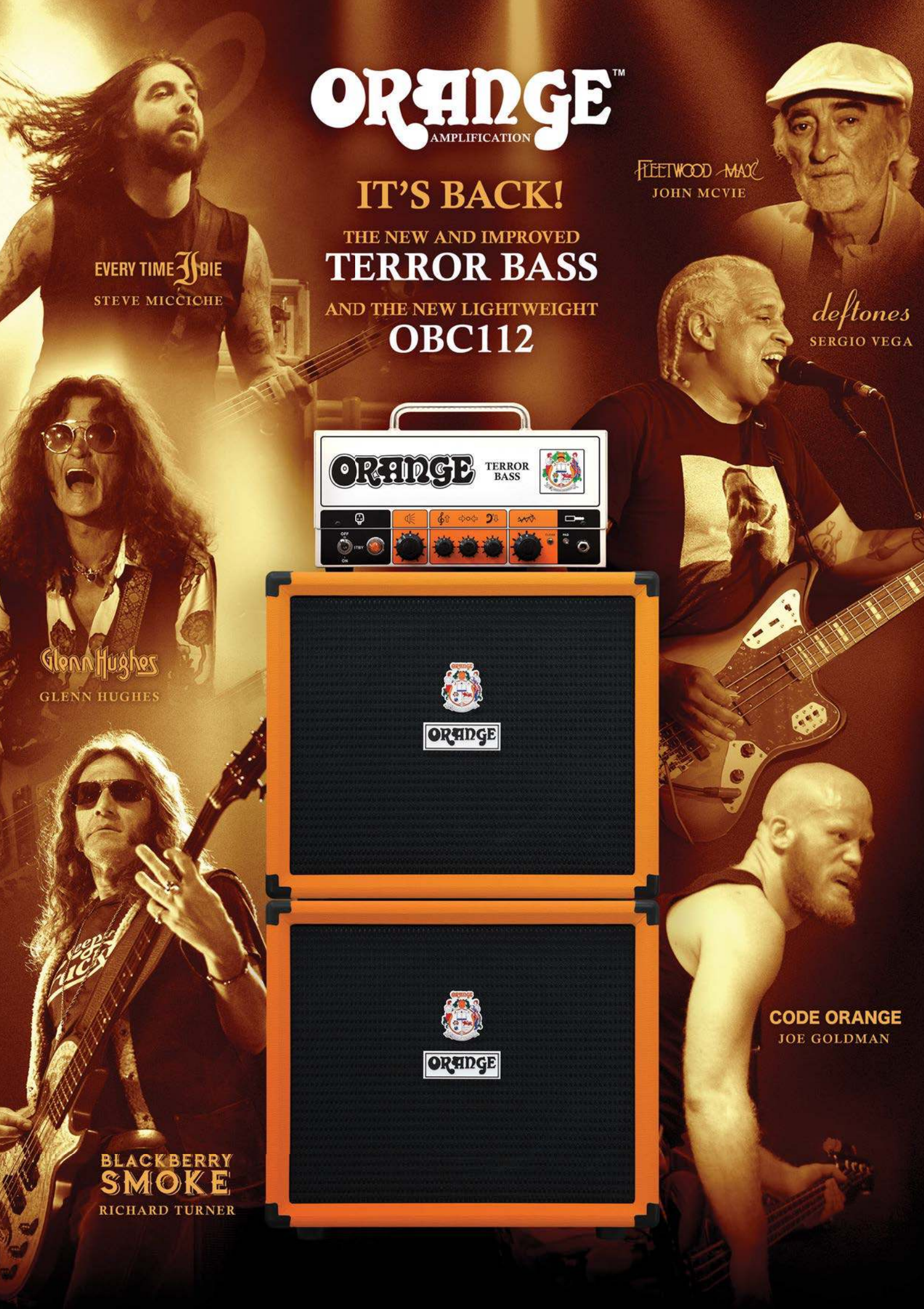
The **Fender Custom Shop 1964 Journeyman Relic Stratocaster** (£3,499) incorporates nods to modernity in the form of 6105 frets and a 9.5-inch fingerboard radius. You can even get roasted timbers from the Custom Shop these days, too, and don't underestimate the power of *that* logo on *that* headstock. **Friedman's Vintage-S** (£2,599) throws a two-point vibrato, 22nd fret and easy-access truss rod adjuster into the mix. Fans of highly-evolved S-types should also check out the **PRS Silver Sky** (£2,299)

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Those necks feel as good as they look
+ Tones have plenty of air and harmonics
+ Smooth vibrato performance
– Body ageing is a little rudimentary on close inspection
– Slightly bumpy forearm chamfer on XSC-1

Despite formidable competition from the Fender Custom Shop and rival boutique brands, Xotic's variations on this classic formula sound and feel like pro-spec instruments should

8/10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STERLING AXIS AX3S

A highly versatile electric that's one of a brace of new additions to Music Man's Indonesian-made budget range. Simon Bradley spins on it...

In 1990, Eddie Van Halen proudly announced the first official electric to bear his name on its headstock, and the Music Man EVH Signature subsequently took the rock world by storm. It truly was an incredible guitar and although Ed decamped to Peavey less than five years later, the design – albeit with a few minor refinements and a name change to Axis – was retained and has remained part of the company's catalogue ever since.

The new version from MM's more affordable Sterling brand is available in two solid finishes – black and white – and like all three of its current American namesakes, it features a basswood body. The fingerboard is made from jatoba – a dense hardwood that's also known as Brazilian cherry, and it's likely that the material will see an increased use in the manufacture of guitars as, not only is it relatively simple to source, it's also exempt from CITES restrictions.

The 'board's 12-inch radius is flatter than that of a US-made Axis and the neck as a whole feels almost totally distinct to the birdseye maple necks that have become such a lauded feature of EB/MM's US instruments. Instead, it has more of a conventional flat D profile than the clubby U-shape found on many other Music Man guitars. This isn't a criticism, however, especially bearing in mind the significant difference in price (the Axis Super Sport starts at £2,399), and it plays nicely regardless.

IN USE

Pickups comprise a pair of body-mounted humbuckers and hard rock and metal styles are provided with sufficient cut and rounded depth to please. Single notes are gratifyingly full, too, and there's only a barely perceptible loss of high end when backing the volume pot off.

The five-way switching allows for some unconventional combinations to enter the fray, as has always been the Axis's wont. We're particularly enamoured by position two, which combines the inner coils in parallel to result in a tone that's part out of phase Strat, part Tele middle position, an option complemented by the neck HB that gives an almost P-90-like warmth-to-twang ratio when used cleanly. Overall we're impressed by the AX3S's tonal versatility.

The vintage-style bridge is set flush to the body so offers just downward travel, and while it's great if all you need to do is dump the bar, it's a bit too stiff for much else. It's also worth noting that the strings, especially the low E and A, can get stuck in the nut when coming back up to tension after doing so, which can throw the tuning way out – it could probably do with some lubrication.

Despite outward appearances, the AX3S doesn't pretend to be an inexpensive fast track to the wonders of its US Music Man equivalents. What it does do, however, is offer a versatile selection of tones, a decent construction quality and a playable neck, all for a shade under £350. And asides from a few fixable gripes, we're very happy with that – go in with the understanding that it might need a set-up, and you'll get a great deal out of this guitar.

WE'RE ENAMOURED WITH POSITION TWO, AND OVERALL WE'RE IMPRESSED WITH THE AX3S'S TONAL VERSATILITY

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Fender's Player Telecaster HH (£579) features splitable Alnico II humbuckers and classic lines, while **LTD's TE-200** (£339) offers a more modern performance thanks to a mahogany body and raunchy LH-150 pickups. We've seen the venerable **Yamaha Pacifica 311H** online for just £257: that's a deal to consider seriously

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Versatile tones
+ Competitive price
+ Sleek lines

– Overly stiff vibrato
– Some tuning difficulties

If you address a few set-up issues, this is quite literally a very small price to pay for a rock-solid, rock-focused electric guitar

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Sterling Axis AX3S

- **PRICE** £349
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody six-string electric guitar. Made in Indonesia
- **BUILD** Basswood single-cut body with bolt-on hard maple neck with natural finish. Jatoba fingerboard with 12" radius, and 22 narrow frets
- **HARDWARE** Vintage-style fulcrum vibrato, black Schaller-style die cast tuners 4+2
- **ELECTRICS** Two uncovered Sterling humbuckers
- **CONTROLS** Volume and tone, five-way blade selector
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISH** White (as reviewed), black
- **SCALE LENGTH** 648mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 51mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 22mm at 1st fret, 35mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 53mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.4kg/7.5lb
- **CONTACT** Strings & Things **sterlingbymusicman.com**

Bartel

BARTEL AMPLIFIERS ROSELAND

The man who was once the 'Tone King' has struck out on his own to build no-compromise guitar amps under his own name. Huw Price finds out if Mark Bartel still has the magic touch...

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Mark Bartel was one of the leading lights of the boutique amp boom. His Tone King amplifiers had an enviable reputation for their wonderful sounds, stunning retro looks and astounding build quality. Now, however, Mark has left the company he founded and embarked upon a quest to discover just how well he can make an amplifier if the need to hit certain price brackets is taken out of the equation.

The result is a gulp-inducing investment, but with it comes an attention to detail that's staggering to be hold. Getting to grips with the Roseland, it's as if Bartel has spent a lifetime identifying all the things that have bugged him and figured out a way to fix them.

For instance, the tweed feels like smooth vintage tweed because it has been treated to five coats of hand-brushed lacquer. And while usually, chassis bolt heads sit in cups that often cut into tweed and tolex, here there are rubber spacers to protect the covering.

The tolex itself might as well be sprayed on because we can barely discern any cuts or mitre joins, and Bartel uses hide glue rather than contact adhesive. It's preferred because it cures hard and doesn't inhibit cabinet resonance.

Remove the back panel and you'll see little rubber grommets in the screw holes to prevent vibrations. Inside the chassis, the build quality goes beyond world class into truly obsessive, with custom-cut, bevel-edged turret boards and drilled posts that screw into the chassis to route multiple wires in parallel like miniature telegraph poles.

Bartel is a long-time fan of early Hiwatt amps and the precision of his circuit layouts along with the neatness of every single component and wire make this influence very apparent. As well as cutting and drilling each turret board by hand, the man even moulds his own elegant control knobs – more swan than chicken heads in this case.

IT'S AS IF BARTEL HAS SPENT A LIFETIME IDENTIFYING ALL THE THINGS THAT BUG HIM AND FIGURED OUT HOW TO FIX THEM

With 45 watts of 6L6 power and onboard reverb and tremolo, the Roseland is Bartel's most powerful amp. Features include paper bobbin layer transformers, silver-plated wire, no negative feedback, a handmade

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **Tone King Sky King** (**£2,829**) is a 35-watt two-channel combo with reverb, tremolo and dual onboard attenuators. **Lazy J's J40** (**£2,579 + VAT**) offers 40 watts of tweed tone with reverb and tremolo modules

leather handle and an interstage transformer coupled phase inverter of the type more commonly seen on high-end hi-fi amplifiers.

IN USE

The way in which the Roseland operates is just as unconventional as its build. If you're thinking there'll be few surprises with just volume, treble and bass to play with, you couldn't be more wrong. Beginning with all three set half way, we're met with a big and room filling sound, with soft trebles and impressive low end girth.

Turning the treble up a touch and rolling off a little bass, we're lulled into thinking this is just an unusually good blackface style amp with impressive clean headroom and improved touch dynamics. Then we test the extremes, and that's where things start to get very interesting.

When the treble is pushed beyond about two o'clock, the Roseland's increase in brightness is accentuated by a simultaneous bass roll off. The tone thins out, in a really nice way for mid-scooped chicken picking, funk and cleaner blues tones. You can actually adjust the treble and bass balance using the treble control alone.

Crank the treble a bit more and the low mids begin to roar as the trebles shimmer over the top and we feel the 'joy of sprang'. Next, we zero the treble and find that gain increases dramatically. There's a thick, creamy overdrive with a midrange boxiness that evokes smaller, darker tweeds.

THE ROSELAND DELIVERS MASSIVE POWERCHORDS, HUGE OVERDRIVE AND AMAZING SUSTAIN

So what's the bass control even doing there? With the treble control set high, turning up the bass a little fills out the midrange while boosting lows, but it also cleans things up. You can compensate by increasing the volume and the Roseland eases its way from crystalline blackface mid-scoop into big-box tweed territory.

Rolling the bass back to minimum lifts the darkness while adding even more gain. Here, the Roseland delivers massive powerchords, huge overdrive and amazing sustain – always clear but without any hint of harshness or shrillness. It's closer to the tonal 'neutrality' that we associate with single-tone-control tweed circuits.

CELESTION
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KEY FEATURES

Bartel Roseland

- **PRICE** £4,699
- **DESCRIPTION** Single-channel fixed-bias valve combo with reverb and tremolo. Solid Eastern white pine cabinet body with 12-piece baffle board built from solid Eastern white pine and African mahogany. Made in the USA
- **POWER RATING** 45W
- **VALVES** 3x 12AX7, 2x 12AU7, 2x 12AT7, 2x 6L6, 1x 5AR4
- **CONTROL PANEL** Input socket, volume, treble, bass, mix, dwell, rate, depth, master volume, standby, power
- **REAR PANEL** External speaker socket with 4/8/16-ohm switch, footswitch cable socket, fuse, IEC socket
- **SPEAKER** Celestion G12 Alnico Cream Speaker
- **DIMENSIONS** 641 x 482 x 298mm
- **WEIGHT** 21.8kg/48lb
- **CONTACT** Coda Music **www.coda-music.com** **www.bartelamps.com**

Once you get your head around the way the volume interacts with the tone controls, the extraordinary range of clean and overdriven tones that the Roseland can produce using just three knobs becomes apparent. It may not be instantly intuitive, but you'll soon get the hang of it and we keep stumbling on great settings.

Although the Ironman power attenuator that he designed during his time at Tone King is highly regarded, Mark Bartel maintains that his latest master volume design "goes beyond the limitations of other volume management schemes by preserving the harmonic balance and dynamic response".

We think he has succeeded, because the Roseland retains tone and touch responsiveness all the way down to whisper levels. You can also knock back the master volume very slightly to soften transient attack. Clearly things will always sound best when there's sufficient energy to induce cab resonance and speaker compression, but few amplifiers span loud clean and ultra-quiet overdrive as well as this.

The onboard spring reverb is another triumph, and having mix and dwell controls available is another huge bonus. It's one of those rare reverbs that doesn't clutter up the sound or obscure detail – even when it's cranked all the way up. We particularly like the way that the dwell control can push the reverb into a gritty and splashy overdrive.

WITH JUST THREE KNOBS, THE ROSELAND CAN PRODUCE AN EXTRAORDINARY RANGE OF CLEAN AND OVERDRIVEN TONES

Being able to mix a clean dry tone with overdriven reverb is glorious, but the Roseland can also emulate a high-end studio spring reverb if you prefer that sort of sound.

Great amp tremolo is really dependent on speed range and feel. We find that the rise and fall characteristics determine the playability – particularly at high intensity settings where an excessively choppy characteristic can be detrimental to general playing duties. Bartel has nailed it and it's hard to fault the depth and swampy vibe.

The Roseland is in essence the Bugatti Veyron of guitar amps. The finish, build quality and tone are at the very top end of the boutique league, but to own one you will have to pay accordingly. You might be able to pick up pair of very good boutique US amps for this money and, as with all luxury items, the law of diminishing returns applies. But that said, with just three preamp controls, the Roseland manages loud Blackface cleans, big and medium tweed tones, and classic British jangle and crunch – all in one package.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Clear, smooth and hugely sophisticated tones
+ Ranges from loud clean to crunch
+ Amazing internal build and innovative cabinet design

– Painstaking attention to detail doesn't come cheap
– The choice of speaker does have an impact on the air-frequency prettiness

One of the most versatile and best-sounding amps we've ever reviewed, with a fanatical approach to every aspect. Quality costs, but the rewards are remarkable

9/10

Designed in the UK by Patrick James Eggle, the all-new Shergold Masquerader makes a polite nod to its heritage and then boldly heads off in its own unique direction.

Made for those unafraid to be noticed, the SM02SD has a solid mahogany body, a beautiful solid rosewood neck and is loaded with genuine USA Seymour Duncan pickups.

ShergoldGuitars.com

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DWELLER
OLD BLOOD NOISE ENDEAVORS
FUZZ ENHANCE
MASTER VOLUME
FUZZ VOLUME
FUZZ RANGE
LPF
LOW
MID
HIGH
GATE
BIAS
FUZZ
OLD BLOOD NOISE ENDEAVORS
HAUNT

OLD BLOOD NOISE ENDEAVORS DWELLER & ALPHA HAUNT

Can these Oklahoma-built pedals live up to the promise of their out-there brand name and even more out-there product manuals? Richard Purvis opens his ears, and his mind...

If you're standing in the ocean, body in the water, feet in the sand, are you a peninsula? No, probably not. You're just a human. Er, come again? Don't worry, we haven't just taken a turn for the metaphysical – that's the opening paragraph of the user guide for the Old Blood Noise Endeavors Dweller. There seem to be a lot of indie pedal makers vying to out-freak each other with psychedelic names, artwork and the like these days, but this Oklahoma company might just have leapt to the top of the pile.

Most important, of course, is what's going on inside. OBNE makes a fairly wide range of stompboxes covering all the usual categories, but the overriding theme is individualism and/or weirdness. Thus the Alpha Haunt is a flexible fuzz with an unconventional approach to EQ, while the Dweller is a 'phase repeater' that combines delay and modulation in fruity new ways.

Both units are solidly built, with metal enclosures and matching plastic knobs straight out of an 80s OEM catalogue, but our Alpha Haunt arrives having suffered one minor catastrophe in transit: a rattling from inside the box turns out not to be a free plectrum, but an IC chip that's come away from its socket on the PCB. It's easily pushed back in, and behaves itself subsequently, so let's put that down as a shipping-related one-off.

Controls-wise, this is one fiddly filth-maker. The distortion is adjusted via fuzz and volume dials plus a high/low gain switch; but there's also an 'enhance' control for dialling in a cleaner (but not clean!) signal, and this needs balancing with the master volume for overall level. Then we come to gate and bias, which work to let you play with squishy and spluttery effects or keep things open and flowing.

Finally, there's the EQ section on the right. It's pretty obvious what the three big sliders do, but you also have the option of engaging a low-pass filter to block out the really jaggedy stuff. This has two modes for different cut-off frequencies, plus a knob for adjusting how ruthlessly the filter is applied.

Though it's a smaller pedal, the Dweller is hardly less complicated. The key control is 'stretch': keep this one at zero and you have a pure modulation pedal, or turn it up to drift into various flavours of delay. The two toggle switches are also easy enough to explain: 'shape' changes the modulation waveform (sine, triangle, or stepped with randomised frequencies), and 'voice' flips between four-stage and eight-stage phasing. But beyond that… oh, let's just start playing and see what happens.

IN USE

We turn to the Alpha Haunt first, because who wouldn't want to play with cuddly wolves? Okay, they're probably not supposed to be cuddly, but once we get our levels balanced up this thing is no more scary than a basket of puppies. The fuzz is exactly how it should be: full and smooth, and running all the way from a gentle 'furring up' effect to a totally immersive cloud of rich, honeyish noise.

Leaving the LPF off for now, the EQ sliders allow precise tailoring of treble and bass content, while the mids can be scooped right out or pushed into the sort of honkiness that would cut through the mix in a brass band. Judicious use of the 'enhance' control can fill out the lower frequencies, but what you don't get is an unmusical mix of competing fuzzy and clean voices – it's a more subtle textural thing than that. When we do flip on the filter, it's striking how much snarling treble and upper-mids content is snuffed out – but that's not to say it sounds muffled. In fact, once you get used to these two more soft-edged voices, you might well want to stick with them.

And that brings us to the gate and bias controls – which are arguably the best thing about the Alpha Haunt. There's fun to be had by tweaking with restraint, but try slamming gate round to full and bias down to zero. This squashes your headroom into the floor and slams the gate up and down on every note like a possessed guillotine. It's the most satisfying and playable version of the 'splat fuzz' sound we've heard in years.

The best way to approach the Dweller, unless you enjoy feeling disorientated, is to try out the four sample settings in that philosophical manual. They're all really cool sounds, and so different it's hard to believe they're all coming from the same stompbox – which makes them a good starting point for your own explorations into the swirling depths.

Three of the four are primarily delays – one straight but building, one with densely rhythmic tripping patterns, one coming across almost like a modulated tremolo – while the other is a robotically flangey version of a random sample-and-hold filter. Flip the shape switch to the left on this last one, while turning down the regen and depth controls, and you'll get something more like a straight phase, flange or vibe effect – but from there on, the controls are so interdependent that you're really on your own.

There are some non-extreme sounds in here if you dig deep enough, and the only real challenge is finding the same one twice. On the other hand, if you have an expression pedal you can take things even further out to sea by shifting the stretch control – from modulation into lengthening delay and back again – as you play. This sounds so wild and glitchy you might end up taking a turn for the metaphysical yourself. Are you a peninsula? Who knows any more?

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

OBNE Dweller

+ Surprisingly wide range of sounds for one compact pedal
+ Adding a footswitch raises the bonkers factor even more
+ Also works as a relatively non-wacky modulation and delay

− With so much going on, it's a shame you can't store presets

The extreme soundscaping pedals keep on coming – and this one is a fine creative toy

8/10

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

OBNE Alpha Haunt

+ Lots and lots of lovely smooth fuzz
+ EQ sliders and low-pass filter allow for high levels of tone-sculpting
+ Spluttery gating effect is really well done

− If you're looking for a simple 'stomp and go' noise generator, this probably isn't it

An all-in-one fuzz machine that covers all the bases from fluffy to fiendish in some style

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Old Blood Noise Endeavors Dweller

- **DESCRIPTION** 'Phase repeater' modulation and delay pedal. Made in USA
- **PRICE** £199
- **CONTROLS** Stretch, rate, mix, regeneration, depth; two-way voice switch, three-way shape switch; internal trimpot for output level
- **FEATURES** Expression pedal input, true bypass, powered by 9V mains supply (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 125x74x58mm

Old Blood Noise Endeavors Alpha Haunt

- **DESCRIPTION** Fuzz pedal. Made in USA
- **PRICE** £219
- **CONTROLS** Fuzz range switch, master volume, fuzz volume, enhance, fuzz, gate, bias, low-pass filter; low, mid and high EQ sliders, three-way LPF mode switch
- **FEATURES** True bypass, powered by 9V mains supply (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 143x121x58mm
- **CONTACT** Audio Distribution Group **audiodistributiongroup.com** **oldbloodnoise.com**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Other flexible fuzzes include the wondrous **Dwarfcraft Eau Claire Thunder** (£199), the classic **Zvex Fuzz Factory** (from £175) and the bewildering **Amptweaker TightFuzz Pro** (£279). For more zany modulation and delay, try the **Meris Polymoon** (£319), **Death By Audio Echo Dream 2** (£270) or **Red Panda Particle** (£269)

Volume
Drive
Boost
the DANE
Drive
Boost

THORPYFX
THE DANE

YouTube lickmeister 'Danish Pete' Honoré has given his name to an overdrive/boost pedal from one of our favourite indie builders. Richard Purvis finds out if it brings home the bacon...

For a moment there we thought Adrian Thorpe had gone all Shakespearean on us, but it turns out the Dane giving his name to this overdrive pedal isn't Hamlet – it's session player and Andertons YouTube star Peter Honoré.

To be fair to 'Danish Pete', he's also toured with everyone from Lionel Richie to Girls Aloud, and certainly has the chops to merit this signature model. The Dane is a dual-stomper with overdrive on one side and clean boost on the other – an increasingly popular arrangement.

You can't switch the order – it's boost into OD no matter what – but you do get Thorpy's usual military-grade solidity and weight, and a gorgeous purple outer shell that's matched (near enough) by the blueish glow of both status LEDs. The engraved markings are a little tricky to read, as ever, but we're used to that quirk by now – and it's not hard to remember what five knobs do. Speaking of which, it's the usual volume, drive and tone for the overdrive, while the two dials on the right control the level and low-end content of the boost.

IN USE

To boost, or not to boost? That is the question. Well, let's have a look at the sample settings in the manual and see. There are six, but it's the last two – one with moderate overdrive, the other identical but with a dash of boost added – that really show off the essence of this pedal as a verse/chorus/solo gain-hopper. The sound of the overdrive alone is essentially transparent and amp-like, with lots of organic warmth and minimal flattening out of playing dynamics. It's full without getting too bloomy even on neck humbuckers, and the tone control – just about neutral at halfway – will easily guide whatever pickups you're using to their sweetest spot.

There's no decibel figure stated for the boost but it's pretty powerful. With 'lows' at halfway we're still in more or less uncoloured territory, but whack it down to minimum and it becomes more like a Vox Top Boost effect, with cutting treble coming to the fore as the meat of the tone is thinned out. Crank that knob to full, on the other hand, and the bottom end gets massive – this can sound downright awesome as long as your amp has the headroom to do it justice.

The fun really kicks off with both overdrive and boost engaged, for a sound that screams 'classic rock' even if you're playing Aphex Twin covers in a ceilidh band. Dynamics still sound open and natural, and you can get a softer, sweeter but no less musical version of that stadium-ready tone just by backing off your guitar volume to around halfway. Considering it only has five knobs and two footswitches, there's really not a lot that this thing can't do.

THE FUN REALLY KICKS OFF WITH BOTH OVERDRIVE AND BOOST ENGAGED, IT'S A SOUND THAT SCREAMS CLASSIC ROCK

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Overdrive and boost go together like beer and crisps, so here are a few more dual-footswitch pedals that are worth stepping on: the **TwinStomp OD Boost** (£195), the **Fulltone Full-Drive 3** (£159), and the **Keeley D&M Drive** (£229)

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Thorpy's usual indestructible build and all-round feel of quality
+ Classic low/mid-gain overdrive with plenty of tonal flexibility
+ The boost can get mighty tasty, and being able to adjust its bass content is a real bonus
– There are plenty of other drive/boost pedals out there – and most of them are cheaper

A supremely classy stompbox that wrings a surprising amount of tweakability from just five controls

9/10

KEY FEATURES

ThorpyFX The Dane

- **PRICE** £249
- **DESCRIPTION** Overdrive and boost pedal. Made in UK
- **CONTROLS** Volume, drive, tone, boost, lows
- **FEATURES** True bypass, powered by 9V mains supply only (not supplied)
- **DIMENSION** 131x108x56mm
- **CONTACT** ThorpyFX thorpyfx.com andertons.co.uk

MUSICNOMAD THE OCTOPUS & GRIP WINDER

MusicNomad reckons its guitar maintenance products are the best you can get. Huw Price tools up to find out...

The Guitar Magazine AWARD EXCELLENCE 10/10

KEY FEATURES

MusicNomad The Octopus

- **PRICE** £13.99
- **DESCRIPTION** 8-in-1 guitar maintenance tool. Made in China
- **DIMENSIONS** 155 x 27mm

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

KEY FEATURES

MusicNomad GRIP Winder

- **PRICE** £15.99
- **DESCRIPTION** String-winding tool. Made in China
- **DIMENSIONS** 130 x 50mm
- **CONTACT** High-Tech Distribution **www.htd-uk.com** **www.musicnomadcare.com**

MusicNomad is a US-based company that offers specialised products for musical instrument care. The range includes a variety of cleaning products as well as some innovative tools to make basic guitar maintenance more straightforward, while also protecting your instrument's finish and easily damaged parts.

First up we're looking at the GRIP Winder string-winding tool, which promises to make string-changing "a whole lot easier, safer and more fun". While we're sceptical that changing your strings is ever likely to be classed as 'fun' the rest of those claims are much easier to get onboard with. It's a tool with just one function – namely to tension and de-tension strings as quickly and smoothly as possible, and it does that job extremely well.

What sets it apart from cheaper string winders is a fat, non-slip handle that makes it easy to grip, and a dual-bearing mechanism for the shaft. Clever design allows the GRIP Winder to fit a wide variety of tuner buttons – including bass tuners – and there's also a sealable compartment inside the handle for you to store loose acoustic bridge pins.

If you're a super-organised guitar tech, we're sure you have all your tools in their right place and never mislay the thing you need at the right time. The rest of us, however, spend a significant amount of guitar maintenance time looking for the correct-sized socket or screwdriver for the job – enter The Octopus.

The Octopus is so-named, of course, because it's an eight-in-one multi-tool. It more closely resembles a screwdriver than a cephalopod, but there's more besides. The screwdriver section is reversible, so there are cross- and flat-head options. With the screwdriver shaft completely removed, there's a socket for 1/2 inch nuts that's slim enough to get at recessed pot nuts or into a Tele jack cup.

Located at the rear of the handle there's a moulding that comprises five hex sockets. Imperial options include 1/2-inch and 7/16-inch, and metric options are 10, 12 and 14mm. The plastic used is ballistic nylon, which promises to be tough and strong, but cannot scratch metal parts and is safer to use in the vicinity of nitrocellulose finishes.

AT THIS PRICE, THERE'S NO REASON WHY WE ALL SHOULDN'T KEEP ONE OF EACH OF THESE IN OUR GIGBAGS

IN USE

The GRIP's winding mechanism has no sideways play whatsoever and feels completely friction-free. The handle is easy to grip and the soft plastic moulding ensures that tuners and headstock cannot be damaged. This will be welcomed by anybody with pearl or lacquered wood tuner buttons.

We particularly like the way the winder 'grips' tuners buttons because there's no unwanted movement. It's also narrow enough to use with tightly packed tuners on Fender style guitars and 12-strings. Besides the fact that there's no tool to prise out acoustic bridge pins, it's hard to conceive of a better manual string winder.

The concept of reviewing tools is a bit odd, but every aspect of The Octopus performs flawlessly. Of more interest is the range of uses... The Octopus can tighten tuner bushings as well as potentiometer and jack nuts. The screwdrivers can be used for strap buttons, tuner screws, pickup height adjustment, string trees and switch screws. You can even use The Octopus to tighten loose jack sockets on amplifiers.

No doubt we've missed a few things, but you get the idea. It weighs next to nothing, takes up very little space and feels like it's built to survive anything. At this price, there's no reason why we all shouldn't keep one of each of these tools in our gigbags.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

THE OCTOPUS

+ Almost everything you need in one
+ Made of no-scratch materials
+ Small and lightweight
– More screw bits would make this more versatile, but there is a 17-in-1 option should you need it

An elegantly designed one stop solution for the vast majority of routine guitar maintenance tasks

10/10

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

GRIP WINDER

+ Everything you'd want from a manual string-winder
+ Gets into tight spaces
+ Won't scratch headstocks
– No bridge pin removal feature

MusicNomad claims to have made the ultimate string winder, and in use, these claims are backed up

9/10

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **Ernie Ball Power Peg** (£22.72) is motorised and the **Planet Waves Pro-Winder** (£9) has an integral pin remover and string cutter. **The JP Deluxe Guitar Tool** (£19) has no hex sockets, but features screwdrivers, Allen wrenches, pliers and a cutter

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CHICKENPICKS GUITAR PICKS

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

These new high-mass picks are designed to add both comfort and tone to your playing. Simon Bradley finds out if there's anything to crow about...

KEY FEATURES

ChickenPicks Guitar Picks

- **PRICE** £6.79 each
- **DESCRIPTION** High-mass plastic guitar picks. Made in Europe
- **OPTIONS** Range includes Regular, Light, Badazz III, Bermuda III and Shredder in various thicknesses
- **CONTACT** High Tech Distribution **www.htd-uk.com** **www.chickenpicks.com**

ChickenPicks are a new range of European-made, hand-finished plectra that marry substantial mass with a number of understated innovations and are fashioned from 'thermosetting plastic'. There's a choice of five different shapes in this range – the triangular Bermuda III and the smaller 'Jazz'-style Badazz III, the more conventionally-shaped Light and Regular and the aptly-named Shredder. The latter is a somewhat intimidating 3.5mm in thickness, while the rest offer thicknesses between 2mm and 3mm.

All are a bright white in colour and if, like us, you're wondering where you should start, the company provides a very useful online 'pick configurator' that matches your standard plectrum to the equivalent ChickenPick. We used the Regular and Light options for the lion's share of this review, but the features we describe, as well as the pros and cons, are relevant to each option.

The pick rims are bevelled to an edge significantly narrower than the published gauge and this, in combination with the mass, aids balance. What's more the bevelling encourages the player to experiment with how the pick is held and it is possible to obtain subtly differing tones from your instrument depending on how much of the pick comes into contact with the strings.

IN USE

We have to confess that we'd assumed that grappling with a 2.7mm pick would be akin to cracking an egg by dropping a house on it, but let us state here and now that we're wholly convinced by these picks and the associated claims made.

Compared to our default Dunlop Nylon and Ernie Ball Ever-Last 1mm picks, to our ears the tones that the ChickenPicks help coax from our Gibson Les Paul Junior and Takamine EN-10C are undeniably improved, with the breadth of frequencies noticeably broader. Whether that is a better tone for you, of course, is a personal evaluation. Needless to say, any sonic alteration is subtle at best but, with the Junior plugged into our go-to Blackstar, when stroking a simple G chord we do experience both a fatter bass response and a sharper treble.

The results are similar when switching to the Shredder and whacking up the amp gain and, yes, the pick does glide over the strings very nicely indeed when sweeping.

THE TONE IS UNDENIABLY IMPROVED TO OUR EARS, WITH THE BREADTH OF FREQUENCIES NOTICEABLY INCREASED

We didn't realise just how much our beloved Dunlop Nylon stuck...

We do find that with our acoustic, both electrified and au naturale, the tone is a little too toppy for our delicate ears but, again, we can't deny the influence that the pick has on the overall sound.

Easy to become accustomed to and a doddle to use, we're pleasantly surprised by these ChickenPicks. Purchasing a new plectrum is one of the cheapest ways to change the way that your guitar sounds, and although the ChickenPicks may seem intimidatingly thick, it's remarkable how quickly you get to grips with the additional mass. They may not be a tonal silver bullet and nor are they a shortcut to sonic nirvana, but at this price, you have little to lose by trying one out.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Dunlop makes many people's pick of choice, and if you want something with a similarly high-mass profile, try the **Big Stubby** (£5.99). While **Ernie Ball** doesn't offer the same mass as the ChickenPicks, its **Prodigy** 2mm option (£9.99) is not to be sniffed at

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Subtle but audible sonic improvement over regular picks
+ Comfortable to use
− High-end enhancement won't be to everyone's taste

Their influence on your tone is as subtle, but it is undeniable, and these are therefore well worth a go

9/10

BERNIE MARSDEN

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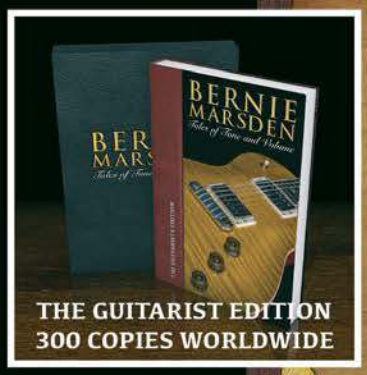

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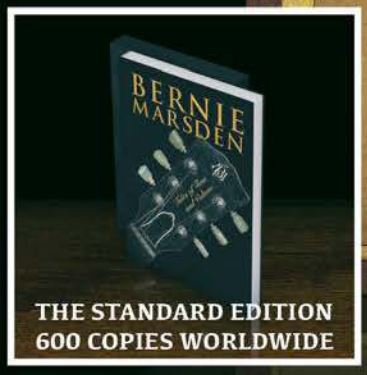

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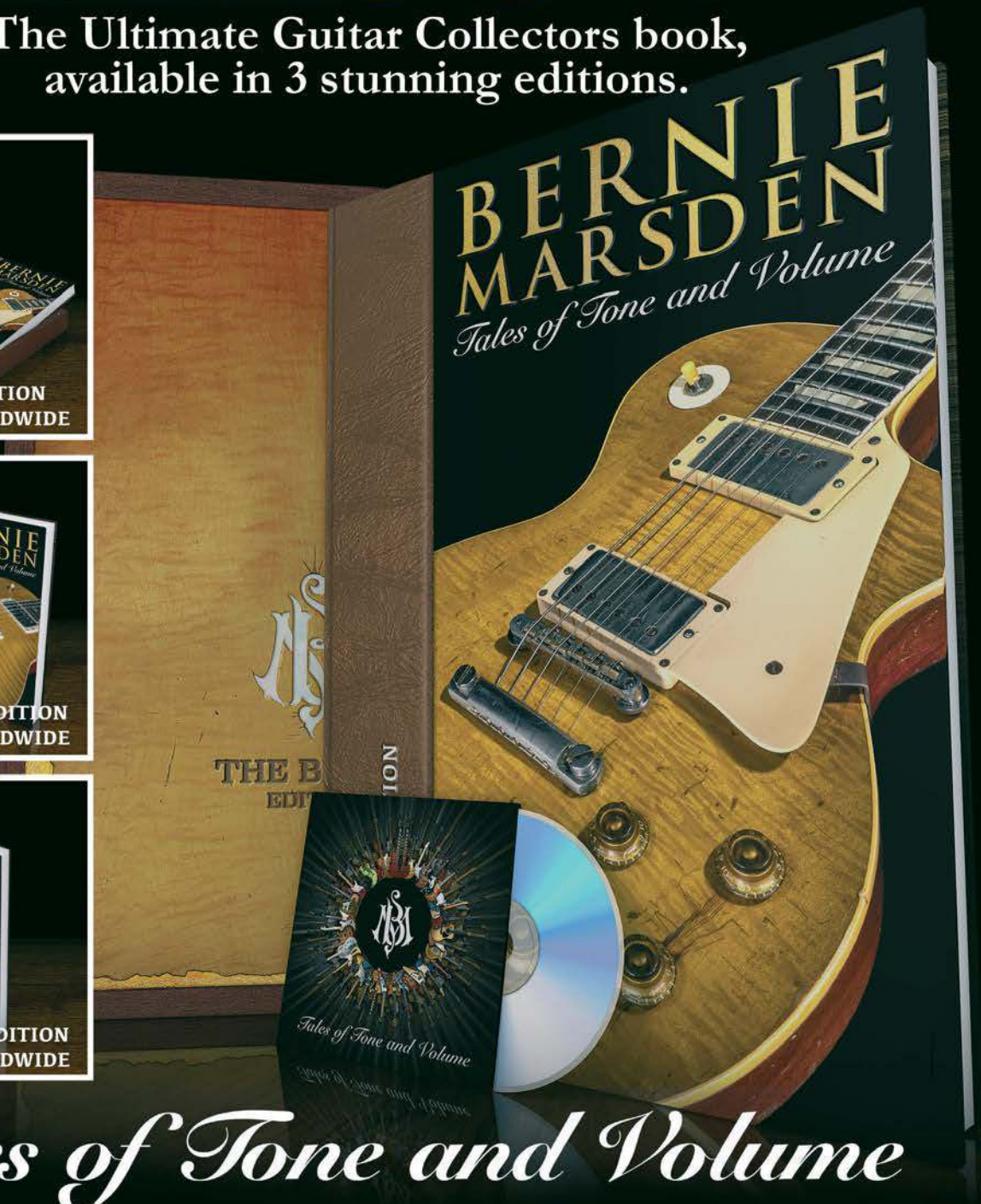

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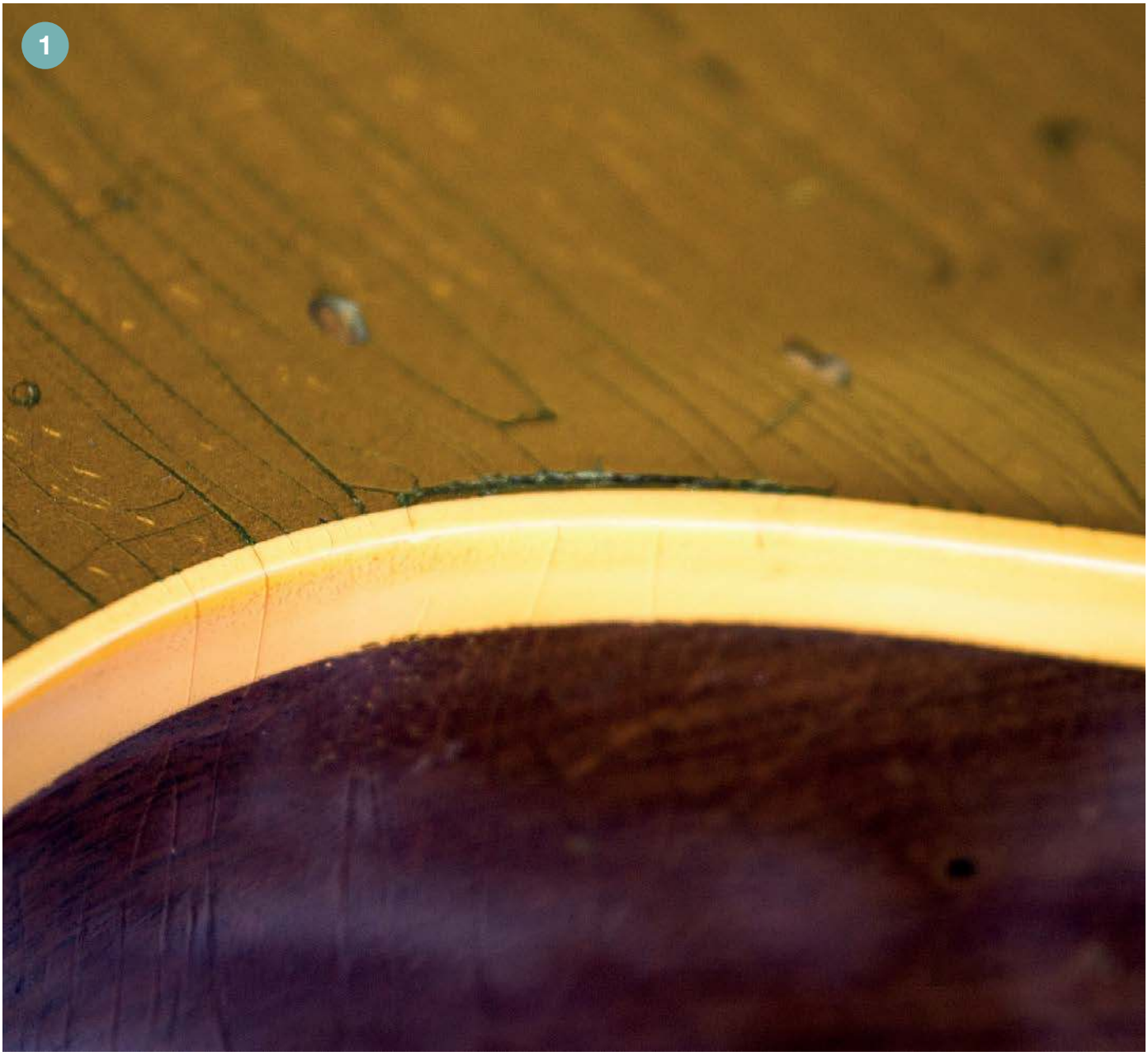
DIY WORKSHOP

GRECO GOLDTOP CONVERSION

With the gold lacquer sprayed, it's time for top coats and polishing up, but first we need to take care of the binding and start relicing some parts. Huw Price rolls on with his marathon Greco Goldtop project...

PART SEVEN



1 Gibson probably used an angled blade to scrape binding during the 1950s and this is most apparent in the waist area on this '54 Goldtop

2 Binding scraping begins using a fresh utility knife blade with taped ends to protect the finish and fingers

3 After some tinted clear coats the binding looks pretty close to an original but the gold lacquer is lighter and less green

Last time around in our Greco conversion, we finished spraying gold, but the lacquer still needed to be removed all around the body's top edge to reveal the binding before the final top coats could be sprayed. While getting ready to do this job, I find myself watching an online video in which famed Gibson relic-meister Tom Murphy demonstrates how to get clean lines, and binding that's square and even in depth all the way around the top edge. It's highly impressive stuff from a genuinely skilled craftsman, and I'm all set to make a binding scraping tool when the loan of a real '54 Goldtop gives me pause for thought.

It's immediately apparent that Gibson didn't have someone with Murphy's skills on the production line the day this '54 had its binding scraped. The depth of the binding around the top edge varies between approximately 1.5mm and 3mm and it's not square with the sides at all.

The edge of the gold lacquer actually looks quite soft – more like a transition than a scribed line – and the binding is angled. This suggests that they did the job with a sharp blade held at an angle rather than a special tool, and this angle isn't consistent, being far more acute in the waist and cutaway areas.

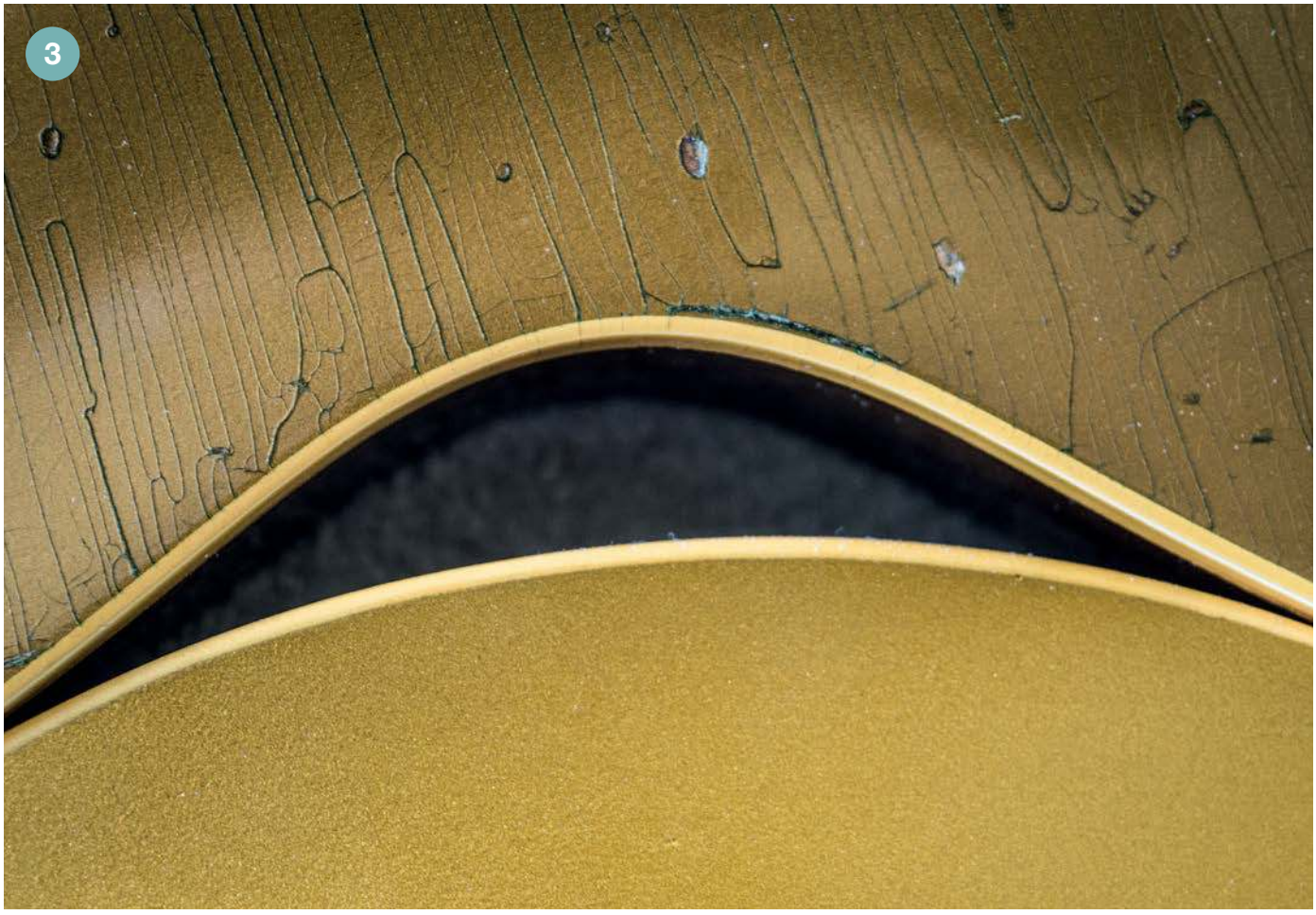
Unfortunately, I don't have a Burst on hand to determine whether Gibson became more precise with binding as the 50s went on, but my ES-330 suggests they were still using the angled blade approach in 1962. I tentatively give it a try using a utility knife blade and straight away it looks pretty good. A decision is made to attempt to recreate the vintage look rather than try to master an unfamiliar tool in an attempt to achieve something technically accomplished but more modern in appearance.

Although my efforts haven't turned out as well as I would have liked, I'm not too concerned because I can work any imperfect areas it into the relic'ing. Greco's binding thickness is also slightly less than Gibson's and I have learned that it's best to remove binding tape and scrape binding while the lacquer is slightly soft in order to get clean lines and prevent chipping.

GET YOUR COAT

Look at any vintage Gibson and the binding will most likely appear

2
11-921
STANLEY ENGLAND
No 199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4 The knob on the left is a repro and the one on the right is from the mid-1950s

yellow or even slightly orange – except in the areas where the lacquer has completely worn away to reveal the off-white plastic. The binding's hue is the result of the clear lacquer coats that Gibson sprayed over the colour coats darkening with age.

I discover that it's easy to replicate the appearance of the yellow or orange binding using Manchester Guitar Tech's light tint and tinted clear respectively. They will also soften and darken the look of the gold coats, but beware, because too much tinted lacquer will give the gold a slightly ginger appearance, which doesn't look right at all.

Eventually, I compromise by spraying just enough light tint clear to 'age' the binding, while maintaining a gold look on top. Light tint clear is sprayed over the rest of the guitar too and I follow up with several coats of clear gloss to build sufficient depth.

The guitar is set aside for a couple of months to allow the lacquer to cure and I follow my usual procedure to bring the finish up to a high gloss. Working my way through ever finer grades of wet and dry paper and micromesh, I buff it out with Farecla G3 and Meguiar's Scratch X. If it wasn't for the various dents that I didn't bother to steam out, it would be a fairly passable finish. But that has never been the intention and I'll get onto the body relic'ing in the final instalment. Meanwhile, I need to think about some aged parts.

KNOB TWIDDLING

Mid-50s-style speed knobs are readily available online, and a set of four doesn't cost much, however you do need to know what you're buying before you start. The cheapest ones are made in Asia, and will do a good job, however they're intended for 6mm pot shafts and not the 6.35mm shafts of CTS pots. As a result, you should consider the shaft width when buying, and also look for those with the numbers and markings moulded into the skirt if you plan to relic them.

Unless you buy a relic set, none of the newly manufactured speed knobs will look vintage. The 50s ones appear to have been hand-painted inside with the same lacquer

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Circa 2009. Natural Satin Finish. All Solid Maple Construction. 50s neck. Snappier tone. Good Condition. Padded Bag (non Gibson).

Fender Player Stratocaster HSH
Finished in Buttercream. Pau Ferro Fingerboard. 2x Humbuckers 1x Single Coil. 9.5" Radius fingerboard. 2 Point Tremolo.

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Fender Player Telecaster Left Handed
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Fender Player Telecaster
New Series! Alder Body. Modern C neck. 9.5" Radius. Finished in Butterscotch Blonde. Other colours available. Please call.

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Circa 2009. 14 Fret Model. Maple Back & Sides. Wonderful condition. Big Tone. With Original Gibson Hard Case.

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Fender MIJ '62 Reissue Stratocaster
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Fender 1988 American Std Stratocaster
Finished in Blonde. Rosewood Neck. Fulcrum Bridge. TBX Tone Control. Great Condition. With original Tags and Hard Case.

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Hofner 456 / 457 Archtop
Circa 1960-62. Recently restored. Original Finish. Pickups rewound. Believed to be mostly original. Very rare with 3 pickups!

Fender Jaco Pastorius
A signature bass to the famous Jaco Pastorius. Fretless. Alder Body. C-Shaped Neck. With Hard Case.

Gibson EB3 Walnut (Circa '73-'74)
Very rare in Walnut & this condition. Stamped as 'Second'. Nice condition for age. Gibson Fibre Style Case included.

Fender Custom Shop Relic '64 Jazz
Made in 1999. Best Relic'ing we've seen. All original. Very Rare. Original Documents Inc. Original Fender Hard Case included.

Fender FSR Limited Edition 70s P Bass
Finished in Natural. Beautiful Ash Body. Maple C Profile Neck. Bound Fingerboard. Vintage Tuners. Includes Padded Bag.

Marshall DSL5C CW - Limited Edition
5 watts. 1x10" Speaker. All Valve. 2 Channel. Limited Edition Western Tolex finish. Fantastic condition. With Single Footswitch.

Laney L5T-112 (Made in UK)
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Fender '65 Deluxe Reverb
12" Jenson Speaker. 22 Watts All Valve. Great Condition. Two Channels (Normal & Vibrato). Includes Footswitch & Slip over Cover.

Top Hat King Royale 35 Combo
Circa 2004. 2x12" Valve Combo. 35 watts. AC30 Based. Handwired. 2 channels. EL84 Power Valves. 12AX7 Pre-amp Valves.

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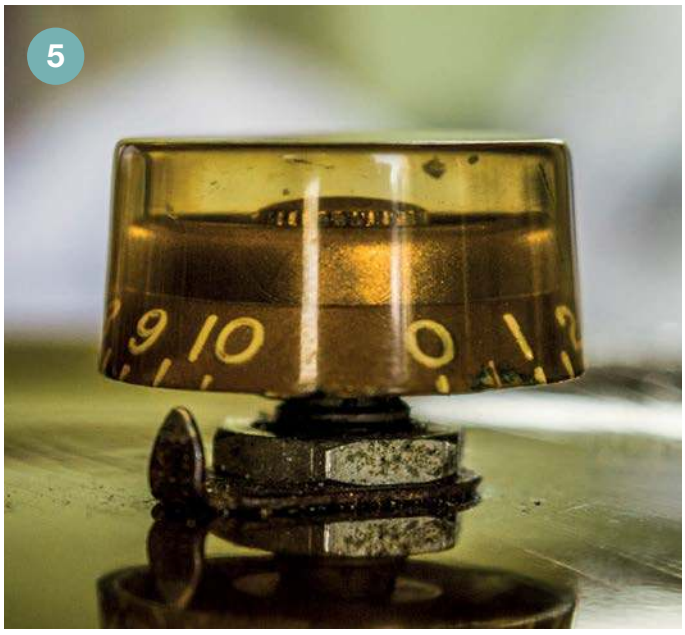


used for the Goldtops and the coverage was a lot better. With the repros, they struggle to get enough paint deep inside the knob and the tone of the lacquer looks a bit too smooth and orange.

With this in mind, I decide that there's only one thing for it – I'm going to make my own relic knobs. First, I wipe the centre sections of the pot with acetone to remove the factory paint, and then sand it off the skirt. The reason for sanding is that I don't want the acetone to dissolve the white markings. This is why you need the moulded markings because transfer markings will wipe off along with the gold. Clear speed pots are available, but they always have black markings. If you can find some with white markings it will save you some work.

Next, I scuff up the external surfaces with 4,000-grit micromesh and cover the outside with masking tape. Double sided tape holds the pots to a paint stick and I spray the exposed undersides with Goldtop lacquer. After a couple of reasonably light passes, I spray a heavier coat and use a paintbrush to work the lacquer into the deeper recesses, but I'm not looking for perfect coverage.

Once the lacquer has dried, I paint the underside with Humbrol metallic green enamel, which you can find in hardware and model shops. Since the lacquer coats are still a bit patchy, the green coats show through when the pot is viewed from the outside. If you want very green looking knobs, or specific green areas, simply wipe away some of the gold lacquer using a cotton bud dipped in acetone before painting the green enamel.

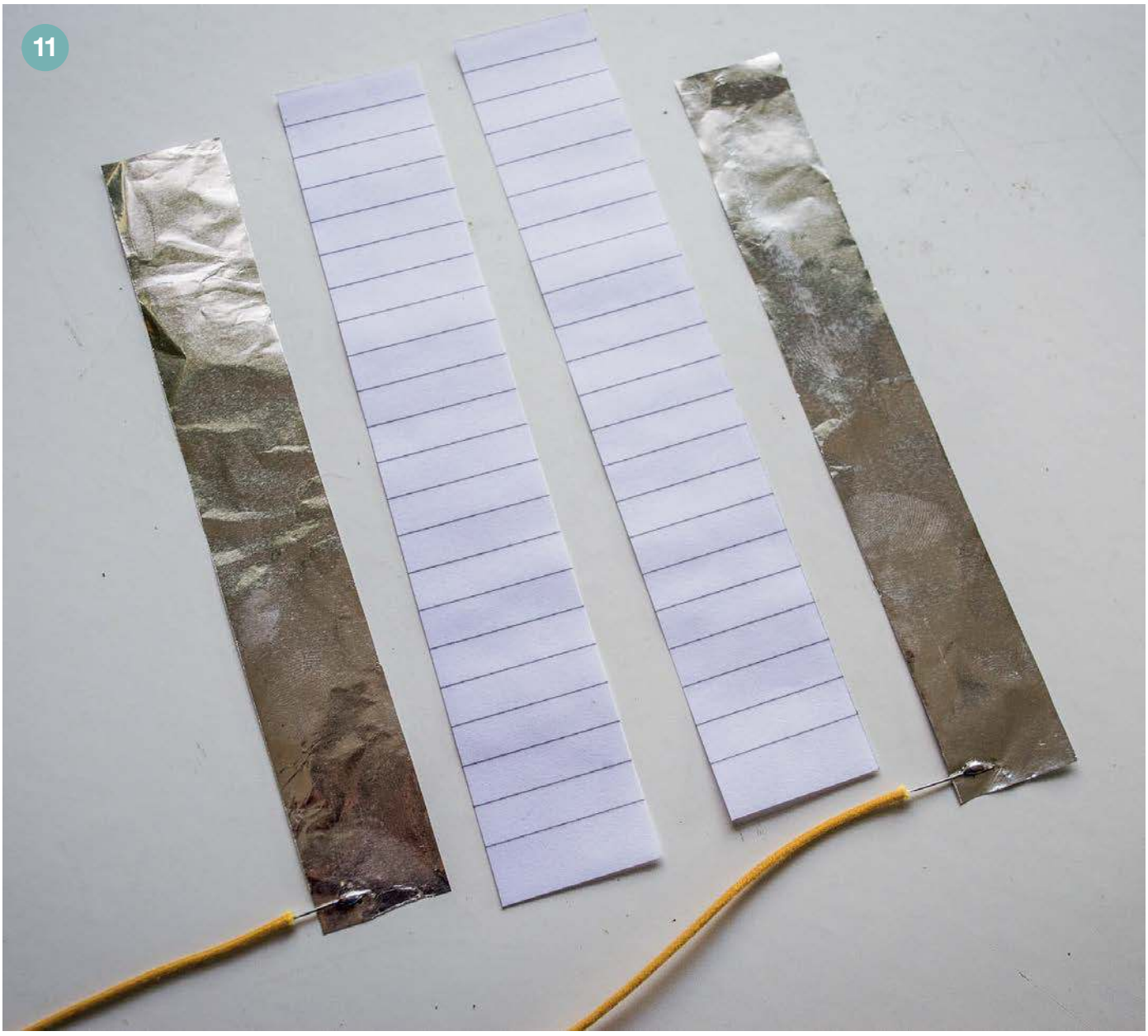
The Goldtop lacquer doesn't stick to the green, so I do a final coat with Humbrol gold enamel. When that has dried, I mount each knob on a split shaft potentiometer. Medium brown and amber ColorTone stain is mixed into a 50/50 solution of water and acetone. This is applied to the outside of each knob with a cotton bud and allowed to dry thoroughly before the process is repeated twice more.

All the repro knobs are completely transparent when viewed from the side, but the originals look slightly amber. Acetone enables the ColorTone stains to penetrate the plastic and you're left with a more amber look. Of course you can buy relic speed knobs, but I'm happy

5 When viewed from the side, the amber hue of the original knob is very apparent

6 The modern knob is clearer and not at all amber when viewed from the same angle

7 This lineup demonstrates each stage of the relicing process, starting with a new knob on the left. The knob on the far right is an original 50s knob, with the final relic'd replica to its left



8 Two strips of kitchen foil, two strips of paper and a couple of leadout wires are all you need to make a capacitor

with the way that these turned out and it saved me some money.

EASY TIGERS

I've made repro caps in the past – for the tweed Pro restoration back in our June 2018 issue – and this time I'm going to make Grey Tiger repros for the sheer fun of it. Using graphics software I recreate the case markings, trying to match the typeface, letter spacing and layout as closely as possible to a real Grey Tiger. It's not perfect, but it's not far off. I find a sheet of thin card in my local art shop that's close in colour to the original capacitor. It's then cut to A4 size and I print off enough copies to make several capacitors.

Vintage Grey Tigers measure 35 x 9mm, so wrapping the cut-out cardboard strips around a 9mm dowel and fixing them with wood glue, the tubes end up close enough. Of course I could stuff these with some nice modern capacitors and seal them up with wax like I did for the tweed Fender Pro. But in addition to making Grey Tiger repro casings, this time I'm going to try rolling my own tone capacitors.

The originals were paper/foil types, so it's no surprise those are the main ingredients for my DIY versions. I cut two strips of kitchen foil one-inch wide and two strips of greaseproof paper 32mm wide. A leadout wire is soldered to each strip of foil, and the trick for doing this is to dab some drops of cooking oil onto the foil and use a very hot soldering iron. First get some solder to stick to the foil, which may take longer than you're used to, and then solder the wire onto the foil. It's actually the trickiest part.

With one strip of printer paper laid out on the worktop, I place a tiny piece of double-sided sticky tape across the one end and lay one strip of foil over the top, leaving 3mm of paper visible along each edge. It's flipped over and the second strip of foil goes on the other side, followed by the second strip of paper. Each time I use a piece of double sided tape to hold the foil and paper. I'm making an axial capacitor, so I make sure that the leadout wires are going in opposite directions and mark the outside foil wire.

Taping the one end helps to get started, but the fiddly bit is keeping everything aligned as you roll up the capacitor. I try to make it as tight as possible and when it's completely rolled, I use masking tape to hold everything in place.

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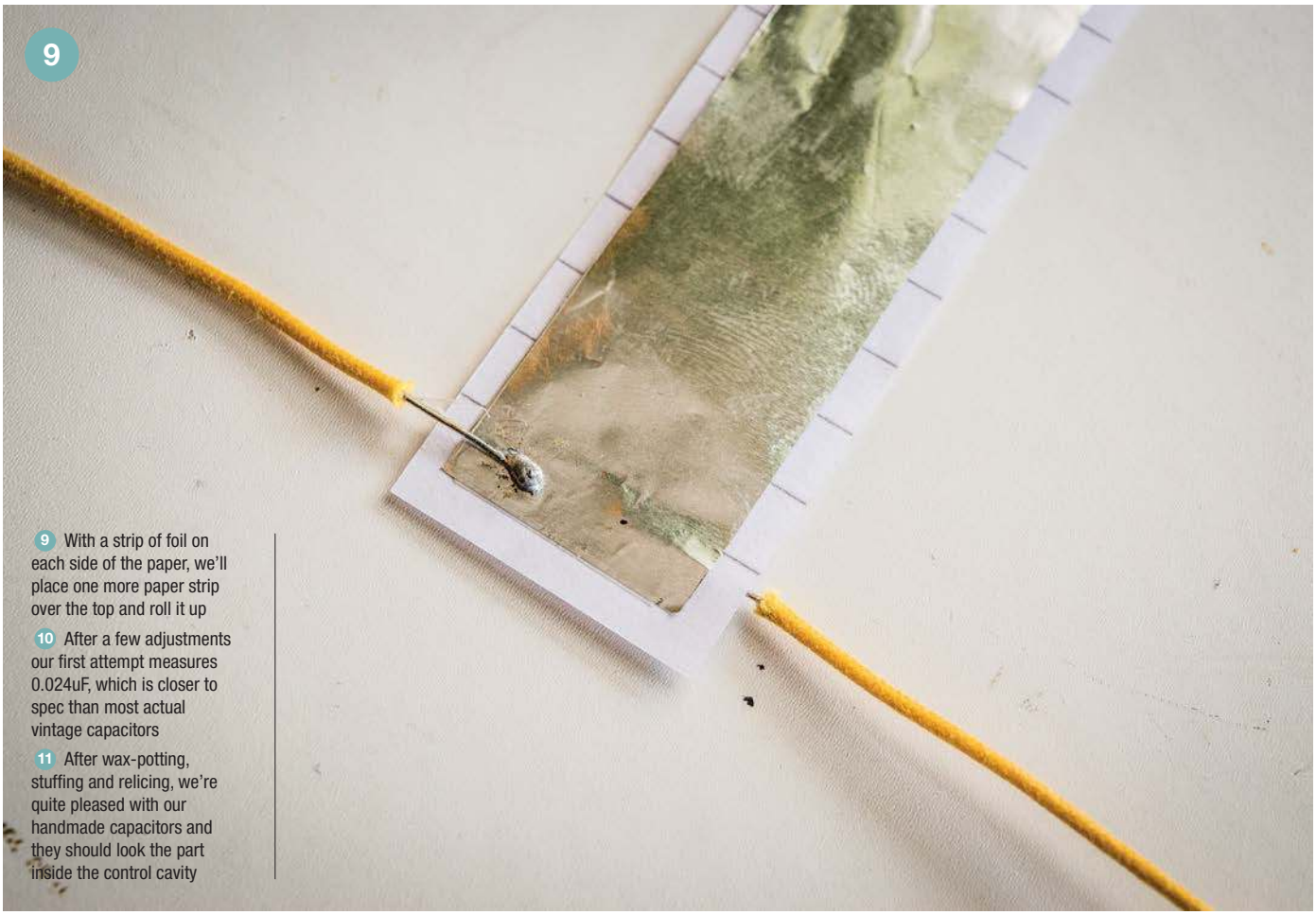
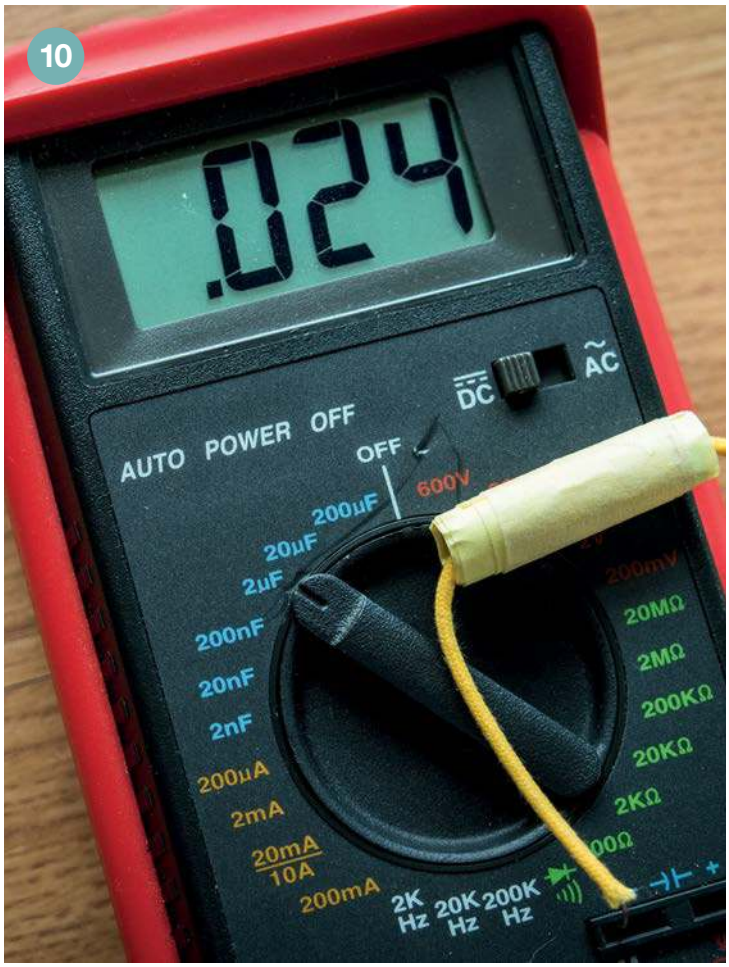


9 With a strip of foil on each side of the paper, we'll place one more paper strip over the top and roll it up

10 After a few adjustments our first attempt measures 0.024uF, which is closer to spec than most actual vintage capacitors

11 After wax-potting, stuffing and relicing, we're quite pleased with our handmade capacitors and they should look the part inside the control cavity



With my multimeter I test for continuity, just to be sure the foil pieces aren't shorting out. Then I switch to capacitance mode and get a reading of 0.033uF. I'm shooting for 0.022uF so I carefully unpick the masking tape, unroll a few centimetres, then chop it off and stick it back down.

After a few attempts I'm thrilled to get a reading of 0.024uF. The DIY cap is hastily installed in a Les Paul and it works very nicely indeed. Treble roll off is gradual and even when the tone control is set to zero, there is still plenty of clarity. The only problem is that the diameter is too wide for the tube casing...

So, I need to try again using thinner paper. The paper acts as an insulator between the foil strips and it's called a dielectric. Capacitance is determined by several factors, including the surface area of the foil and the thickness of the dielectric material. With a thinner grade of paper, fewer turns should be required for the same amount of capacitance and that means a smaller diameter, too.

Printer paper measures 0.08mm, cigarette papers are 0.01mm and the paper from a notepad is about 0.04mm. Since cigarette papers aren't long enough, I go with the notepad paper and manage to roll a couple more caps that are close enough. Back in the day they used unbleached electrical 'kraft' paper.

Each capacitor is wax potted with molten wax that I have heated in a bain-marie – much like pickups – and inserted into a tube. I fill the tubes with molten wax using a syringe because it's the easiest and least messy way of getting it in there. When it cools, the caps solidify and are held in place. Lastly, I dip the caps in the molten wax to coat the outsides before sliding cloth coverings, that have been stained amber and sprayed with medium brown lacquer, over the leadout wires.

After a dusting of newspaper ash, they look pretty good. I can't claim they'd pass for the real thing but they have the right vibe. Of course Luxe make wonderful quality replicas, but they cost about £30 each and I'd estimate mine cost about 10p! If you want to make your own tubes for hand-rolled caps, or simply disguise modern ones, it's fairly straightforward to do something similar – give it a go!

NEXT MONTH...

With the internals looking suitably old, Huw turns his attention to relic'ing the outside...

EXPANDING THE SEQUENCE

Extending a chord sequence is a great way to come up with new ideas. Rod Fogg enlarges things...

Figure 1 introduces a sequence of four chords which should be familiar as only the F sharp diminished seven is at all out of the ordinary. The idea is to play these chords as fingerstyle arpeggios, using your thumb on the bass note and playing the other three notes of the chord successively with the index, middle and ring fingers – and let them ring. Played one note per beat you will get a four bar phrase. Theory-savvy readers will know that the F♯ diminished chord is functioning as a substitute for B7, and you can turn it into B7/F♯ by standing your index finger on its tip on the D string and playing the B string open. Try it both ways and see which you prefer.

An added ninth chord adds colour to a major or minor chord, so in figure 2 we have A minor add nine followed by A minor add nine with G bass. In these two chords the minor third and the added ninth are only a semitone apart, which makes a pleasing clash and adds interest to the sequence. We have also experimented with a B diminished chord. Unlike the diminished chord we used in figure 1 this one has no seventh – it is just a triad. We have tried to create a sense of melody within the chord progression by moving the notes of each chord to the next by the smallest steps possible. This is known as 'voice leading'.

We are getting in early with this month's theory moment: Am/G consists of the notes

Figure 1

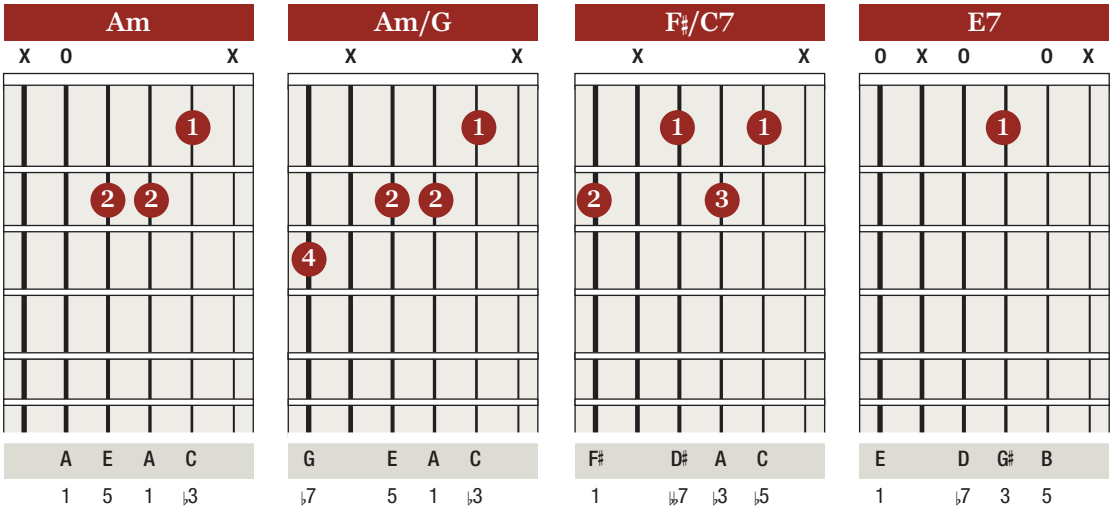
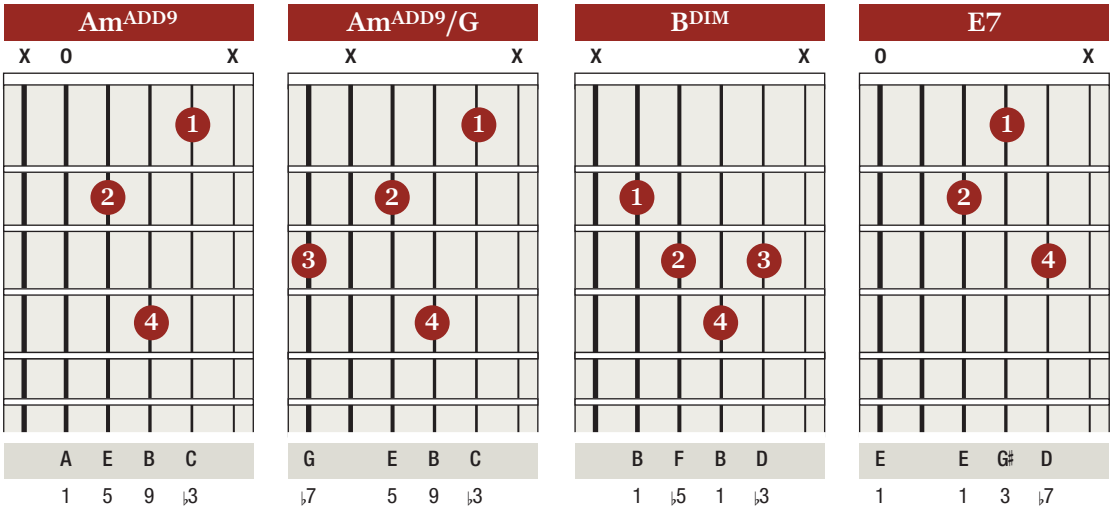


Figure 2



A, C, E and G. Rearranged, these could be C, E, G and A, which is a C6 chord, so these two chords are pretty much interchangeable. C major seven occupies similar harmonic territory to C6, the added B being same note as the added ninth over A minor. All this is a long-winded way of explaining why the second chord in figure 3 can be C major seven. Arpeggios can be more interesting if the notes do not predictably rise or fall, so we have rearranged the order of the notes in the first two chords, and gone for higher inversions of the last two, meaning that the highest note of the chord is now the third note to be played.

In figure 4 we add the note D to the first two chords. This creates Amadd11 and Cadd9, a different flavour of added note to those we tried earlier. Since we haven't actually used a B7 chord in any of the examples so far, we've gone for a very colourful B7♭9 with D♯ bass as the third chord. Holding the flat nine over into the E7 chord as a flat 13th shows that in this kind of sequence you can discover some cool sounds by hanging the notes of one chord over into the next.

Anywhere there is a major chord it is worth giving a minor chord try, and that's exactly what we do in figure 5, where the second chord is now Cm13. It is an intense sound, but the closeness of voicing from the previous chord helps it to fit in, and we only need to move it down one fret to arrive on Bm13, which leads very smoothly to the E7 chord at the end of the sequence. The fret hand is stretching out a bit here, but keep the fingers on their tips and continue to let the notes ring on.

Spreading out the notes of a chord, such as the first chords in figures 5 and 6, has a slightly different effect to clustering the notes tightly together. Compare those chords with the first two chords in figures 1 and 2. They are all of a broadly similar flavour, but the 'opened out' voicings have a little more angst due to the bigger leaps between the notes.

If the big stretches at the start of figure 6 are a problem try putting a capo on the guitar a few frets up – we enjoyed the sparkly tones with a capo at the fifth fret. You might notice that we have more or less returned to the original chord sequence from figure 1. Play your favourite four examples from figures 1 to 6 as a loop and you'll get a 16-bar song section. How about recording it and seeing if you can add a guitar solo on top? Have fun and see you next month!

The 'opened out' voicings have a little more angst due to the bigger leaps between the notes

Figure 3

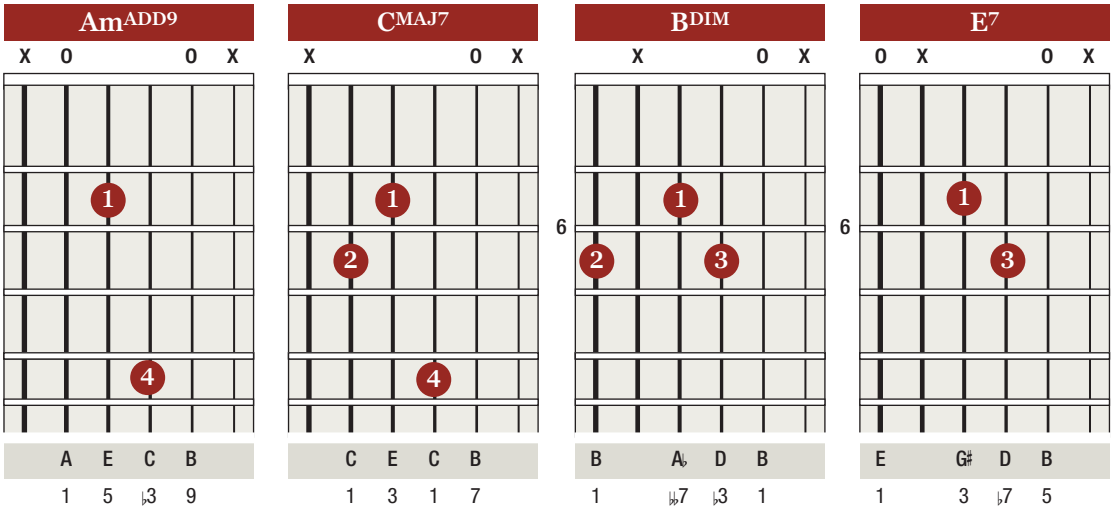


Figure 4

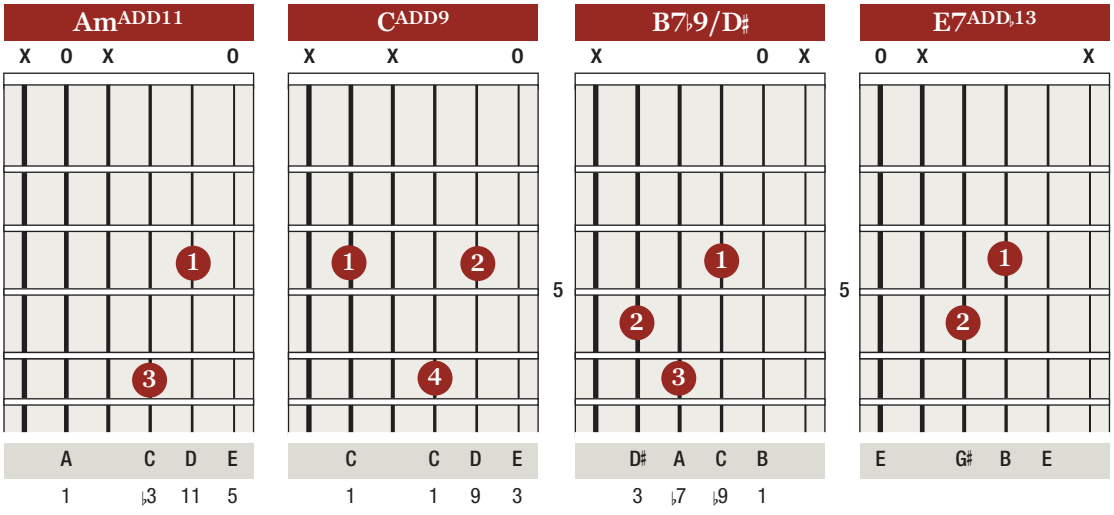


Figure 5

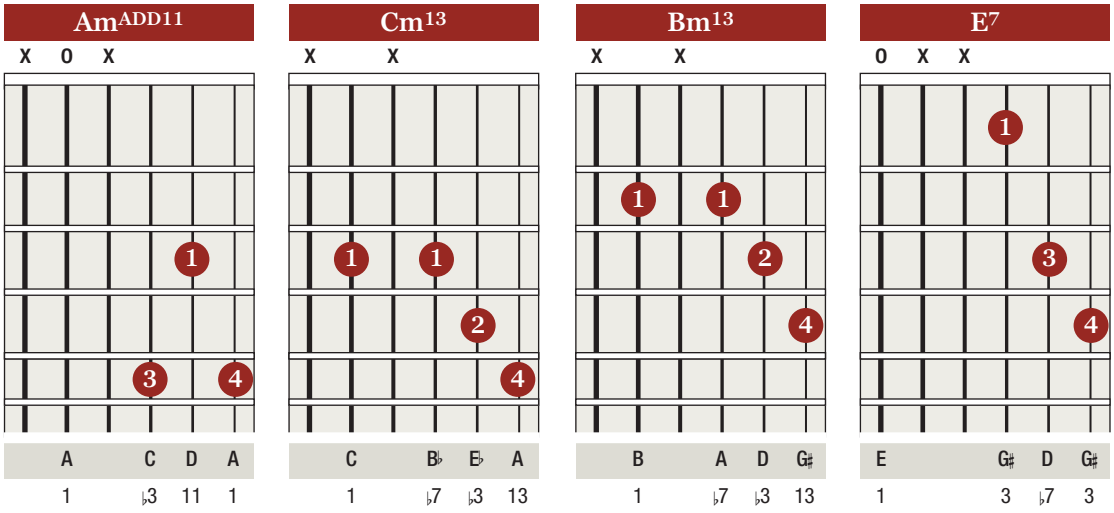
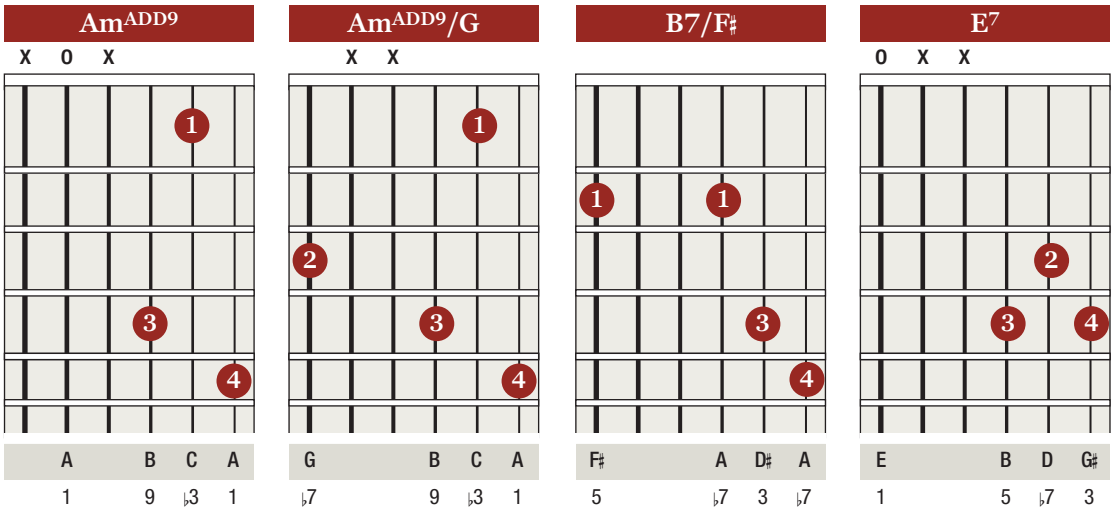


Figure 6



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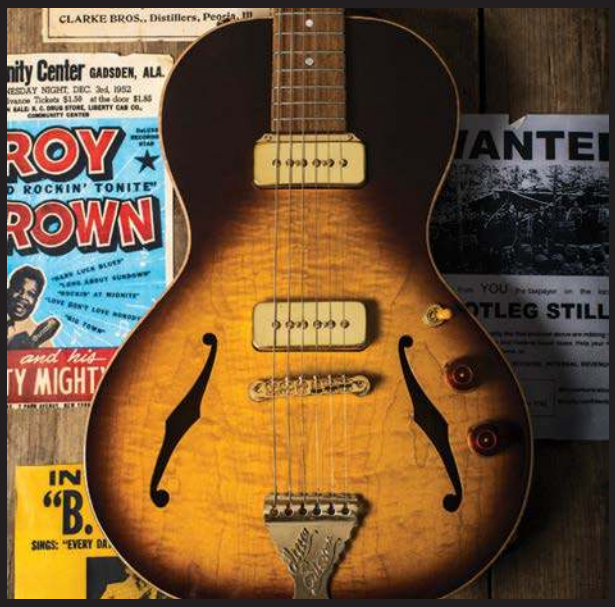

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MARK TROTTER

The Lonely The Brave guitarist and gear hound on falling over, Esquires and taking a highway to the Danger Zone...

1 I couldn't live without my...
"As I'm sure is the way with most guitarists, my answer on this probably changes daily, but out of all the guitars I own I think I could never be without my Fender Masterbuilt John English Stealth Esquire. That guitar can do literally everything. It puts up a fight and makes you work for it but it is basically perfect for me. One minute it's serene, next minute it's tearing your face off and everything in between. A proper weapon of a guitar that."

2 In another life I'd have been...
"There was never a plan B. from the moment I found guitar my mind was set. I always loved planes as a kid and wanted to be a pilot right up until guitar took over so we'll go with that."

3 The moment it all started...
"Yes! I remember being 12 years old and feeling so frustrated with school and everything else going on at that time. I knew I needed a release; a way of escaping the mundane normality of life. The moment of clarity came as my best mate told me he had just had his first guitar lesson. That was it. Hook, line, sinker. Head first into guitars for the rest of my days."

4 The one that got away...
"Oh god, hundreds! I bought the same Les Paul three times once, only to sell it again! These days I'm much more fatalist about these things. I sold a couple of guitars over the last year or so that I thought I would never part with. To be honest I don't miss them now. I guess I am happy with the core gear that I have and know I can cover the bases I need. Having said that I do need a Tele Thinline at the mo..."

5 My Spinal Tap moment...
"We were playing a small run of shows in Holland a few years back; the first chord at the first gig saw me flying backwards and landing on Mo's [drummer Gavin 'Mo' Edgely] kit. The next night I went one better and fell through my amp rig, sending one of them off its flight case and off the back of the stage! It was still working so I just carried on playing laid on the floor, unable to get up. Mo looked over mid-song and mouthed 'What the fuck is wrong with you!?' I honestly don't know... still don't!"

6 The best advice I've ever been given...
"Don't stamp on toes on the way up, as these may be the feet you're kissing on the way back down. My friend Cliff, our label boss in the States, told me that one. I think it's a mantra for life, not just music. Stay humble, stay you."

7 The first thing I play when I pick up the guitar
"Every time for years now it's been *Perth* by Bon Iver. I remember hearing that track for the first time while in Minnesota back in 2011 and just being blown away. I know Justin plays it with a capo so I have my own bodged version for standard tuning, but what a track. The whole album is still stunning. Love that band."

8 The most important thing on my rider...
"Tea bags. No tea, no show."

9 My guilty pleasure...
"So many but I'm gonna go with *Danger Zone*, Kenny Loggins. It's *Top Gun*'s fault. Man, I really did want to be a pilot!"

10 If I could play one thing...
"I wish I could shred generally. Not that I would use it in the band context but it would just feel good to have it there, in the pocket, you know, just in case. On that basis I'd love to nail some of Dimebag's solos. The guy was out of this world. Go listen to the isolated guitar of *I'm Broken* and how it's all one take. Just great fun."

Lonely The Brave go on tour with new singer Jack Bennett in January 2019

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